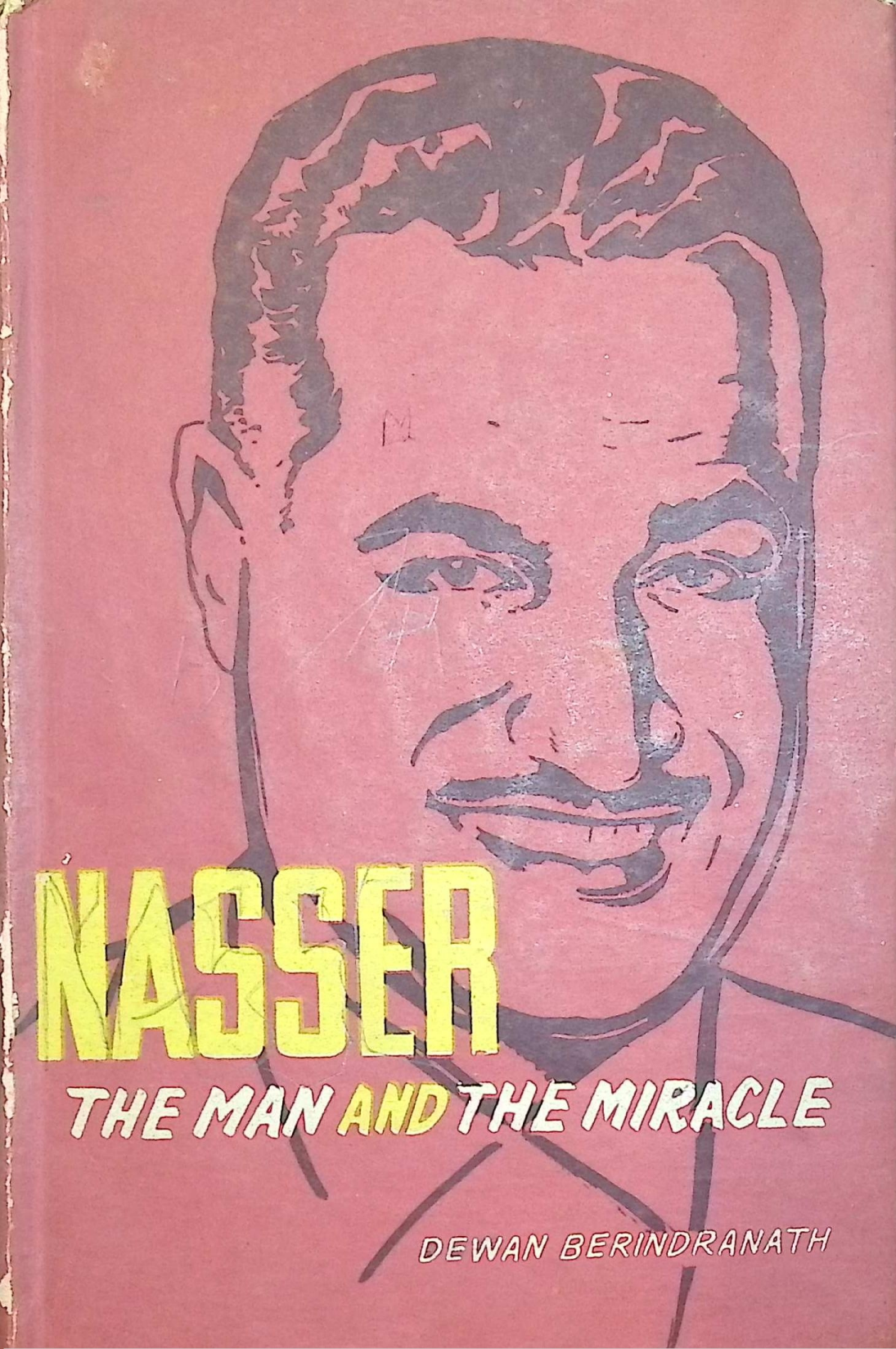
NASSER
THE MAN AND THE MIRACLE
DEWAN BERINDRANATH

*"Every one of us is able in his own way to perform a miracle."*

*—President Gamal Abdel Nasser*

*The liberator and the liberated*

DEWAN BERINDRANATH

# NASSER

## THE MAN AND THE MIRACLE

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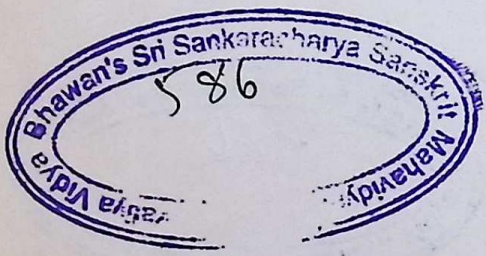


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# Preface

The life account of Gamal Abdel Nasser and the contemporary history of the Arab world especially Egypt are inseparable. A study of one cannot be completed without keeping the other in perspective. This book is intended to be a twin biography of both. The story revolves round the life of an individual. Yet the background of important events in his life, actions of other characters on the stage and the significance of his achievements in relation to the whole of the Arab world, are equally important.

Most of the problems Nasser faced, and is continuously tackling are common to the whole region. This book may thus prove to be a dialogue among the revolutionary movements of the two continents of Asia and Africa. Compared to all the revolutions including the French, the Russian and the Chinese, the Egyptian Revolution has a relevance far greater for us, as a contemporary experiment carried under conditions more or less similar. We may not agree with all the components of Nasser's miracle. Some of the advantages and disadvantages which the Egyptian revolution had, may also be lacking with us. But among all the revolutionary movements in the contemporary Afro-Asian world, we are perhaps nearest to this one.

This is firstly because Nasser heads a country which can claim to be as much a part of Asia in the political sense, as it is of Africa in the geographical one. Of still greater significance is the fact that Nasser has attempted to transform his country from a backward feudal order to a progressive socialist system employing completely peaceful methods. His insistence upon secular ideals in politics, his championship of a non-communal approach in world affairs and his struggle for the defence of liberty in Asia and Africa, are vitally important for us to be understood in terms familiar to our people.

The book being about the man who more than anybody else has been responsible for bringing Egypt close to India as a partner in a common struggle, it was inevitable that the study uses terms and historical references having a direct relationship with Indian history and environment. How much the author has succeded in it, he would leave the readers to judge.

It is however his proud privilege to thank all those who through their generous cooperation have facilitated the completion of this rather complicated study. The foremost among those are the numerous friends from every strata of life, the author met during his extensive travels of the Arab world. These friends have been so numerous and generous that I shall not venture to mention any names so that none may be left out.

In the matter of collection of material including decades' old files of some leading Arabic newspapers and other important documents most of which had to be got from Cairo, I am grateful to my dear friend, Dr. S.T. Lokhandwala, Head of the West Asian Department, Institute of Advanced Studies, Simla. To him also I am grateful for help in translating Arabic material into English. Thanks are also due to Dr. M.S. Agwani, Professor and Head of the Department of West Asian Studies, Indian School of International Studies, New Delhi, for his suggestions regarding the source material for this book and making some of it available to the author. Special thanks are due to Mr. Satya Prakash of the Navin Press whose co-coperation has been most valuable in bringing out the book in time, while maintaining the best of production values. I shall be failing in my duty if I do not thank my wife, Mrs. Manorma Dewan, whose contribution has been so great that in all fairness her name should have come as a co-author.

New Delhi, DEWAN BERINDRANATH

September, 1966

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I

# The Prologue

Gamal Abdel Nasser wrote after the Revolution : "The seeds of revolution were not only in me, I found them also in the hearts of a great many others...These seeds were already in us when we were born, implanted by a previous generation."

The seeds had begun to be sown in the Egyptian mind by the middle of the 19th century. The Ottoman Caliphate had by then become the sick empire of the world. So had its dependencies in the Arab world including Egypt.

Every attempt had been made during the Turkish rule to obliterate traces of anything Egyptian or Arabic from the country's life and civilisation. But even then when Napoleon landed in Egypt, he could still find a great deal which was peculiar only to the land of the Sphinx and the Nile. A keen student of geography and history, he was overawed by the glory of Egyptian antiquity. "Forty centuries look down upon you", was his comment to his soldiers, on the Sphinx. Napoleon also realised the importance which this land, serving as a bridge between Asia, Africa and Europe, had for an empire-builder. He was thus the first among European imperialists to realise, that the key to the treasures of the East lies in the domination of Egypt. Every conqueror following him knew that he could not hold India without holding Egypt.

Mohammed Ali, an Albanian mercenary started his career almost on the lines of the Moghul subedars and had retrieved Egypt for the Caliph after the death of Napolean. He later defied the Caliphite and became independent. By that time other imperialist powers began prying for the prized possession. A handy opportunity came during the days of Mohammed Ali's

successor, Ismail, who had earned the nickname of "the greatest debtor" in the world. This was in spite of the fact that Mohammed Ali had treated Egypt almost like a personal estate, making his successors the greatest landlords in the world. Consequently, the exploitation of the peasant rose to such an extent that even an imperialist like Disraeli had to say, "The people of Egypt have never known life. They have merely existed and can continue to exist for any length of time they care."

At this stage appeared three remarkable men who could be called fathers of Egyptian emancipation. They were: Mohammad Abduh, a great liberal scholar who for the first time conceived the idea of secular nationalism in spite of his strong devotion to Islam; Jamaluddin Afghani, to whom goes the credit for making Egyptians realise that the destiny of Egypt was eternally linked with the rest of the Arab world; and Col. Ahmed Orabi who, for the first time, raised the banner of revolt against feudal oppression. Orabi along with his followers in the Army and with a strong backing from the people, had risen in revolt by storming Cairo and Alexandria. Khedive Tewifik was soon found trembling over this uprising and sent urgent summons to the British for aid. In the beginning of 1882, British Naval vessels landed in Egypt and occupied the country after a battle in which thousands of Egyptians were killed and Orabi and his followers were taken prisoners. The episode not only sealed the fate of Egyptian aspirations for over half a century, but also made the Khedive completely subordinate to the British. From then on the real ruler of Egypt became the British High Commissioner on whose authority rose and fell Governments, on whose orders Egypt made war and peace, and on whose pleasure Egyptian politicians indulged in their pet games of bribery, graft and corruption.

In the meantime, Orabi had been exiled to Ceylon. This closed the first round of the battle of Egyptian emancipation. What sort of ideas were brewing in the minds of the Egyptian nationalists at that time is clear from the following letter Orabi wrote to a friend soon after his arrest. It is remarkable that, this noble warrior had written almost in the vein of his nationalists counterparts in India, who, too, during

that period had started clamouring for freedom and dignity. In his letter Orabi said : "Time will come when Egypt would no more be in the hands of a myraid of foreign employees filling every available post, to the exclusion of the Egyptians ; our native courts will be purified of abuses ; codes of law will be enacted, and, which is more important, carried out ; a Chamber of Notables will be instituted with a voice and a right of interference in the affairs of the Egyptian people ; the swarm of usurers in the village will be driven out."

This vision for a democratic tomorrow forged on the determination for a defiant today, was carried forward by nationalist leaders and thinkers, the most important among whom was Mustafa Kamel (not to be confused by the Turk leader, Attaturk) who had taken a great deal from the liberal ideas of the French Revolution and the American War of Independence. Egypt thus started demanding the establishment of a liberal democracy of the British type. Kamel died in 1907 in the prime of his youth, but his task was taken up by leaders like Saad Zaghloul who in the course of time was to become the Gandhi of the Egyptian Freedom Movement.

In the meantime, the First World War had broken out and under that pretext, in 1914 the British had made Egypt a protectorate, thus breaking all its ties with the "sick man of Europe"—the Ottoman Empire. The humaliation was too much for the thoughtful Egyptians, who had started rallying round the nationalist banner raised by Zaghloul. The years of war saw the gathering of a patriotic storm in Egypt. This storm was to break on 13th November, 1918. On that day Zaghloul, along with three followers of his, went in a delegatian called the Wafd, in Arabic, from which his party later derived its name– and asked the British High Commissioner, General Sir Reginald Wrigate, to grant Egyptians independence. "England is the strongest and the most liberal of the great powers", they pleaded. "In the name of those principles of freedom which guide her, we ask to be her friends." To this request Birtain responded by deporting Saad along with three of his colleagues to Malta. If the British reply was typical of the mood of the imperialist arrogance being displayed by the descendants of

Clive and Cromer, the Egyptian reaction too was completely in line with the type of freedom struggle we had already launched in India. It is perhaps more than a coincidence that in the year of the great massacre of the Jalianwala Bagh in Amritsar, Egypt too began witnessing a type of popular eruption it had never seen before.

On March 10, 1919, 33 days before General Dyer indulged in the orgy of mass murder of freedom fighters in Amritsar, and 2 days after Saad had been deported, an unprecedented mass revolt started sweeping over the length and breadth of Egypt. For the first time Egypt experienced a chain of strikes and peoples' boycott of the British, very much on the lines of our non-cooperation movement. The first phase of this movement ended on 7 April, as soon as the British were compelled to free Saad and his colleagues by allowing them to attend the Paris Peace Conference.

This, however, was not the end of the trouble. Much greater troubles had to be faced later. Yet the first phase had brought noticeable gains to the national movement. It was during this struggle that relations between the Muslim majority and the Coptic Christian minority were cemented in a firm bond of secular nationalism of which Mohammed Abduh had been the pioneer.

This also marked the first phase of the struggle for emancipation of Egyptian women, who like their sisters in India, had for the first time taken part in any political activity by participation in the freedom struggle in great numbers. So in the year 1918-19, England learnt that the unsuppressable Egyptian patriotism was born. Gamal Abdel Nasser was born on 15 January, 1918. It was to be said about him later, that he has a wondrful sense of timing. He could not have chosen a a better time for his birth !

2

# The Boy from Beni Mor

Beni Mor is a medium-sized village of about 5,000 inhabitants in the Assiut province of upper Egypt. Like any other village with mud houses of thatched roofs, the people live upon gossip and agriculture. In this village lived a family of small land-owning peasants—the Nassers. Two sons of theirs had been somewhat lucklier than their friends, and had gone to a secondary school. The eldest one—Abdel Nasser Hussein—got a job in a post office and in the course of time had become a post master in charge of suburban post offices.

While posted in Alexandria, he married in 1917, the daughter of a well-to-do building contractor. In January next year, his wife Tahima gave birth to their first child. They named him Gamal Abdel Nasser—beautiful, the slave of the Victorious one.

Post master Abdel Nasser Hussein was constantly on the move from one post office to another. Perhaps therefore young Nasser could not start his studies till the age of 8 when he was sent to a primary school in Cairo. There he lodged with the younger brother of his father, Khalil—a junior Government servant. Uncle Khalil was not only a fierce nationalist by conviction but also a hard taskmaster by temperament. Both these qualities were to make a deep impression upon the young mind of this rather introvert lad.

Three months after his 8th birthday young Nasser's mother died on giving birth to her fourth son. As is usual in such circumstances he was sent to live with his grand-parents in Alexandria. Thinking the boy was motherless, grand-parents tried to pamper him a little. His father later remarked that this

pampering "spoilt" him. "The old couple gave him too much of pocket money to see pictures with the result that he never did his home work." The young boy was again shunted back to Cairo to live with his uncle, the strict disciplinarian. There, too, he learnt more in spare time than in class room. As is usual with some great men including Jawaharlal Nehru, Nasser was not very good at studies. This might be due to the fact that he was being shunted from one place to another and the change of schools made concentrated study impossible. The other reason may be that his father had re-married in the meantime. But the third one seems most important ; Egypt at that time was passing through the worst type of political convulsions.

The current of nationalism was the strongest in 1920-30 and obviously these were the most impressionistic years for the young Nasser. The time he was born, four centuries of Turkish oppression and half a century of British colonialism, had already given birth to a strong tide of Egyptian patriotism bursting at last like a storm.

The Wafd party, the first of the great nationalist parties of modern Africa, had already been born under the inspiring leadership of Zaghloul on the day he demanded independence for Egypt and the British exiled him to Malta. It became apparent from that day that the struggle from then onwards would be against British colonialism. The trouble had subsided in October, 1919, but again it erupted in 1921, when the demand for Egyptian independence was reiterated by Saad Zaghloul, 'necessitating' another deportation. Two distinguished historians of modern Egypt have remarked : "It is obvious that passive resistance suggested by Gandhi's example had proved immensely popular with the Egyptian masses."

As a result of the struggle, the like of which no African or West Asian country had seen before, and the British imperialism had witnessed only in India, the colonialist rulers decided to terminate the so-called protectorate and granted Egypt limited independence in 1922. This "independence" was circumscribed by so many limitations that it looked like a farce to Egyptian patriots. To complete the farce Sultan Ahmed Faud I was given the title of the King and was allowed to use the prefix of His Majesty to his name.

His heavy indebtedness and his habit of leisurely entertaining himself at his favourite coffee bars and spending lavishly on pimps and procurers made his subservience to the colonial agents complete and unbounded. On top of this, Egyptian feudalism started entrenching itself not only on land on which it had held an undisputed survey but also in the newly set up capitalist enterprises. It also began taking over leadership of the newly stirred up political movement. The chief characteristic of Egyptian feudalism had thus become its simultaneous hold on the economic structure and political power.

Johd Gunther has remarked about the Beys and the Pashas who flourished in abundance in the Egypt of those days : "The Egyptian Pashas were not only probably the richest class of their kind in the world, in comparison to the rest of the people, but also the most corrupt. During the war when I visited Egypt, the saying was that 40 new millionaires were created every month largely through graft. The King himself was the country's single largest land-owner. He derived from a tradition opulent and extravagant beyond belief; his grand-father the Khedive Ismail owned one fifth of all cultivable property in the entire country, and nevertheless borrowed from Europe the net sum of $ 495,000,000 in a reign lasting 16 years. It has been calculated that more than 60 per cent of the Egyptian national income went to 1.5 per cent of the population."

It was into this atmosphere that Gamal Nasser was plunged at the age of 7 and remained in it till he left the school, when he was 18. It has been rightly remarked that in his case there was no permanent home, no settled family background to give him a sense of aloofness and immunity from the problems of other students. Having lost his mother and being shuttled to and fro, living sometimes with his parents, sometimes with his uncle and then with his grant-parents, then with the uncle again, made deep demands upon his mental and emotional resources. In this atmosphere, any boy of a lesser calibre could have been lost. But Gamal Nasser not only overcame the tide of personal misfortune but also got himself involved in the bigger things of life even when he was very small.

His younger brother, Ezz, a journalist now, proudly tells that "the President was a very serious child right from the

beginning. He never mixed or played games with other children of his age. Only occasionally he would allow me to play with him." Gamal Abdel Nasser has himself recalled that at the age of 10 when he was at school in Alexandria, "one day on the way to school I ran into a crowd that was demonstrating. What for, or against what, I had not the faintest idea. But it looked like a good fight, so I joined it."

In 1927 the great Saad Zaghloul had died and the Wafd leadership had been taken over by Nahas who, though the son of a peasent, was unable to stop the infiltration of feudal elements into the top echelon of party leadership. In the meantime, the so called Balfour Declaration, which had unilaterally promised during the war, a Jewish State for the Zionists in Palestine, and was ironically and perhaps symbolically made in the year Nasser was born, had started begetting its evil fruit. A ferment was thus being created in the young Egyptian mind, of which the young Nasser became an inseparable part. Revolutionary movements of Orabi, Kamel and Saad fired his imagination. He became an eager reader of the lives of great men like Hannibal, Alexander, Napoleon, Rousseau and Voltaire. Significantly, his only living hero was Mahatma Gandhi leading a mammoth nationalist movement in India.

Answering a question from the British author Desmond Stewart about his boyhood heroes, Nasser remarked a few years ago that his conception of a hero was a sort of combination of Gandhi, Orabi and Voltaire. He says : "I admired Gandhi very much. His methods of peaceful resistance fired my imagination. But again when I was smaller and we were studying religion in school, I admired Mohammed very much. He was, I considered, a leader working for his people, to liberate them from ignorance." He added, "I learnt one virtue from Mohammed, the virtue of patience."

About this time, Arab nationalism as distinct from Egyptian nationalism, started stirring his imagination. "I and the other boys", he told Stewart, "were always reacting to the Arab incidents as reported in the press. Whatever happened in the Arab countries affected us. The chief events ? The Arab revolt in Palestine and the French brutalities in Syria."

## *Scar on the Heart*

About those days he later wrote in *The Philosophy of the Revolution* : "Those days are far from distant in my mind when I lived as a student, marching in demonstrations, clamouring for the restoration of the 1923 Constitution which was duly restored in 1935, and when I used to join delegations of students calling on leaders in their homes and demanding from them to unite for the sake of Egypt; and as a result of these efforts the National Front was formed in 1936." A climax of this turbulent career was reached on 12th November, 1935 when thousands of school and university students demonstrated in Cairo's Liberation Square. There ensued a usual scuffle between the police and the students. In that Nasser received a blast of bird shot in the forehead. That scar has not yet vanished. Perhaps a deeper cut was made on his heart.

Reporting about the incident, a leading Cairo newspaper *Al-Gihad* said on the following day : "Among those injured in the clash was Gamal Abdel Nasser, a student at Nahada High School." This was the first notice the press took of the man, who a couple of decades later, was to dominate the entire world press. Recording the same events, a close friend and a contemporary of Nasser, Anwar Sadat, has written in his *Revolt on the Nile*, "Then came the revolution of 1935, inspired by students, in which Gamal Abdel Nasser, then an adolescent, played a leading role. The result of that rebellion was a fusion of the parties into a national front. The same idealism was to work in both insurrections, but these heroic efforts had been in vain." More about it later.

The only 'bona fide' extra-curricular activity in which Nasser is reported to have indulged in, was dramatics. He played the leading role in Shakespeare's Julius Ceasar in a school performance which ironically enough was given at the Britannia Theatre in Cairo. Why did Julius Ceasar interest him ? He himself has explained : "Because he had conquered the British". His mind was constantly set upon ideas of getting rid of imperialism. What sort of action did he envisage ? In *The Philosophy of the Revolution* we find an answar : "At one stage of my life enthusiasm meant positive action. Then my ideal in positive

action changed until I came to realise that it was not enough that my nerves alone should cry out, and that I must communicate my enthusiasm to others until their nerves also cry out.

"In those days I was at the head of demonstrations in Al Nadha School. From the bottom of my heart I clamoured demanding complete independence ; others repeated my cries ; but these were in vain.

"They were blown away by the winds and became faint echoes that do not move mountains or smash rocks. Later, positive action meant in my opinion that all leaders of Egypt should unite on one thing. Our rebellious cheering crowds passed their homes one by one demanding, in the name of the youth of Egypt, that they should unite on one thing. It was was a tragedy to my faith that the one thing they united on was the Treaty of 1936." The treaty had formalized the farce of Egyptian independence, retaining all the essentials of British domination.

Slowly the path of positive action became clear to him. He had worked hard during his last days at school and perhaps because of that in spite of his deep involvement in agitation, was able to get good marks in the final examination. During that period the question which faced every young man faced Nasser too. What should he do after finishing School ? His father wanted him to take up an examination for the civil service, but his mind had been set upon an Army career. Why the Army ? Later on he was to write : "When I left school in 1936, I realized that the road to the nation's liberation would be long and hard and the only way to reach this goal was through the army."

In an interview to a British journalist, he elaborated this remark by saying that he had realised that the Army in Egypt was the "only educative force". It had become his conviction that the army alone could be immune from political pressures emanating from feudal politicians and had the potentialities of bringing liberation.

The same year he applied for admission to the Military Academy where the cadets were trained for officering the army. Some of the replies which the young Nasser made to a questionnaire he had to fill in for admission, are revealing. He replied

"No" to a question whether there were any army officer in his family. "Why did he wish to become an officer ?" "To give my life for the protection of the nation". On being asked whether he owned any property, his reply was "No, we are workers". He was also asked about the recommendations he could give for his admission. He wrote back "My recommendation is God." "Worst" of all, he was asked whether he had taken part in anti-Royalist demonstrations of a year ago, 1935. And he was obliged to say "Yes". His application was refused. He then took admission in the Law College spending there six unhappy months studying, brooding and preparing himself for the second attempt for admission to the Military Academy.

Meanwhile, following the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936, restricting and defining the British position in Egypt, the policy of admission to the Military Academy had been somewhat liberalised. The doors of the Academy were opened to more candidates to fill the need for a greater number of Egyptian officers in the army. This enabled the middle class youth and even boys from villages to join the service which until then had been reserved for Cairo's elite. Nasser applied again and was selected along with about 40 others, out of 450 applicants.

18 months later a new class of 20-year old Second Lieutenants graduated. A group of these young officers was posted in the garrison of Manakabad in upper Egypt. Among them was a Second Lieutenant called Gamel Abdel Nasser who had passed his military examination by obtaining the unusually high marks of 70 percent and was considered to be a serious and efficient young officer.

3

# Darkness Before Dawn

The group of Second Lieutenants, which was serving in the third cavalry battalion at Manakabad, was destined to change the face of Egypt in the next decade and a half. Among these officers was not only 2nd Lt. Gamal Abdel Nasser but also sincere youngesters like Abdul Hakim Amir, Anwar Sadat and Zakaria Mohieddin. A contemporary of Nasser, Anwar Sadat, wrote later in *Revolt on the Nile*, "2nd Lt. Nasser was the most serious among all the young officers. This was not only because he did not like some of his superiors whom he thought lethargic, apathetic and, to a great degree, unpatriotic. But also because, most of these officers hailed from feudal families and were there not because of merit, but due to the position their families occupied in the feudal heirarchy.

The young officers' dislike of these senior men was, however, only incidental. A greater source of disgust for Nasser was the condition of the Egyptian Army. What sort of Army it was, has been best summed up by Jean and Simonne Lacouture in their monumental work, "Egypt In Transition". "The army which absorbed the young wolves of 1938 was a mediocre hotch-potch of parade units, forces used as police for hunting smugglers, cavalers, cavalry squadrons for the sons of Pashas intent on playing polo. At that time, rank depended on physical appearance. A skinny general was either a fool, a sick man or an eccentric. The best formations still consisted of former Turkish officers who despised the 'natives', while the most efficient units such as the frontier corps made up mostly of Nubians and Sudanese, were often compromised in illicit arms-traffic. In some ways the situation recalled that against which Orabi had revolted. "Our army was not particularly

good : it was the British who had organized it and it was in their interest that it should not become a genuine force." This remark was made to us by General Aziz el Masri, who was the head of the army in 1940."

The state of the nation was still worse. Large-scale peasant unrest was already sweeping over the whole of Egypt. There were constant clashes between peasants and feudal lords in which hundreds of peasants had to suffer hardships including arrests and beating by feudal hirelings. Nor could the young officers forget the fact that the apex of feudal exploitation was the King himself. The monarchy not only controlled the manoeuvres of the political parties like a game of chess, but also had a total stranglehold on the economic life of the country. At least one-fourth of the total income of the nation was directly or indirectly controlled by the Royal family.

Seeing all this around them, it was natural that these young officers would, after hectic manoeuvring all through the day, and returning dog-tired in the evening to their tents, sit around a campfire at the foot of Mount El Cherief and talk about many things which mattered to the nation. About these talks Anwar Sadat writes : "We were young men full of hope. We were brothers-in-arms, united in friendship and in a common detestation of the existing order of things. Egypt was a sick country. The social and political unrest in Egypt was the theme of our debates.

"Our days were sad, but the nights made up for it. One of our company was a manly and straight-backed young officer, nearly six feet tall, who was reserved and serious in manner. If we started a light-hearted conversation, it was invariably Gamal Abdel Nassar who interrupted to bring us back to graver topics. He had lost his mother early in life, and he bore the marks of that grief.

"Gamal's convictions were deep-rooted. He was a true son of the soil. He was passionately attached to the land of his origin, and his conversation was sown with proverbs and sayings from his native province.

"What did Gamal Abdel Nasser say to us as we sat around the camp-fire on Mount El Cherif ? His message to us was

this : "We must fight imperialism, monarchy and feudalism, because we are opposed to injustice, oppression and slavery. Every patriot wants to establish a strong and free democracy. This aim will be achieved, by force of arms, if need be. The task is urgent because the country has fallen into chaos. Freedom is our natural right. The way lies before us—Revolution."

While the young officers sat, talked and indulged in the usual exercises at Manakabad, events were moving rather swiftly not only for Egypt but more so for the whole world. September 19, 1939 had seen the outbreak of the Second World War in which under British pressure Egypt was forced to sever relations with Germany. Though technically Egypt stayed neutral, yet for all practical purposes its life was being geared to the demands of the British war machine. Martial Law had been imposed and normal political activities suspended. The group at Manakabad had also got dispersed. Lt. Nassar was first transferred to Alexandria, then to the famous battle ground of of El Alamien followed by a posting for two years in Sudan.

In Sudan, he had a colleague called Abdel Hakim Amer who was with him at Manakabad too. He was later to become the Field Marshal of the U. A. R. Army and the closest friend of President Nasser as his Minister of Defence. They both experienced a burning antipathy towards British machinations. They had realised that the British wanted to make the fullest use of Egypt's geographical position for their own strategy in war. The realisation had downed upon them that if Egyptian interest had not been subordinated to British strategy, the best course for Egypt would have been to stay neutral. In 1939 India, too, faced the same dilemma of being forced into a war with which we had nothing to do.

With the outbreak of war it also became apparent that in spite of its so-called neutrality, Egypt was being totally ruled by orders from White Hall. With the whole country under occupation of British forces, the shape of things could not have been otherwise.

By February, 1942, things were going from bad to worse for the British. Crowds in Cairo streets were demonstrating

against the army of occupation just as their Indian counterparts were to do six months later in August, 1942. By that time the Ministry had fallen and the King under popular pressure wanted to appoint Aly Maher as Prime Minister, known for his opposition to the British proposal of declaration of war by Egypt. The British could not stomach this. So Lord Killearn, British Ambassador, walked into the Palace surrounded by South African officers carrying pistols. He walked into the King's study and presented him with an ultimatum : "Either appoint Nahas Pasha as Prime Minister within 24 hours or you lose your throne."

## *Seeds are Sown*

Farouk kept the throne at the cost of complete loss of his prerogatives as King. Nahas was appointed Prime Minister, and his first action was declaration of war even though this alienated him totally from the popular feelings. The incident proved a turning point in the histroy of the Egyptian revolutionary movement. The younger corps of the army in particular took it as the worst humiliation for their country. They believed that Farouk had betrayed the nation by losing an opportunity for being free. German armies were just knocking on the doors. The people were in an unprecedented mood of revolt. Even if the King had refused to comply with the British ultimatum, the heavens would not have fallen upon him. "The worst that could have happened", argued young officers, "was that he would have been taken prisoner. This would have made him a hero of the nation and a symbol of the freedom movement. With the war situation as it was, and the temper of the Egyptian army being what it was, the British would have hesitated to deal with him roughly."

But Farouk neither thought nor acted. He merely submitted. The ferment in the army had reached the point of open indignation. Anwar Sadat wrote a few years later : "This latest affront to our country gave a new stimulus to the revolutionary movement. Abdel Nasser and Abdel Hakim Amir determined that Egypt must never again suffer such humiliation. The real revolutionary conspiracy dates back to this time. The movement had now passed from the theoretical to the militant

phase. Recruitment was stepped up. Abdel Nasser, during the course of the year, was appointed as an instructor at the Military College, where he came into contact with hundreds of cadets and was able to select the best elements for the revolutionary movement. If he had made one false steps, or if any one had informed on him, he would have been instantly court-martialled.

It is, however, interesting that the idea to organise the work patiently prevailed only after a great deal of discussion. Many of the patriotic officers who met immediately after the incident of 4th February in the barracks of Zamalek, a suburb of Cairo, were of the view that the insult should be avenged immediately. Gamal Abdel Nasser, by that time promoted a Captain, however, strongly opposed them. He was convinced that no plunge in the dark should be made in a fit of anger and emotion.

All those who knew him both at the Academy and at the Army Staff College where he became an instructor in 1946, testify that he outshone every one else as a teacher. These were also the years of great mental preparation for him. He became a voracious reader of books not only on military startegy which was his favourite subject, and which he read in the works of Napoleon, Clausewitz and Liddell Hart, but also of books by Laski, Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru, Lenin and other revolutionary thinkers of the day. About those days a friend of his has written : "Gamal was a vertible dynamo, always working, reading, discussing and planning the revolution."

The discussions were held mostly at the houses of like-minded officers, most of whom were teachers in the Academy or at the Staff College. Nasser himself had made it a regular practice to invite fellow officers to his home for the purpose of testing their political sentiments. Those of whom he considered reliable and responsible he would draw into the secret military organisation which he was heading. Obviously he proved a great judge of men and their character, since no one ever betrayed his cause.

What were the things they discussed ? They included the state of the nation as well of the world. In particular, they

discussed the remedies for the malaise which had overtaken Egypt. Quite a few of them thought that mass upsurge, coupled with revolutionary violence, was the only answer to the problem. Yet Nasser not only disapproved of terrorist methods but was also able to convince his colleagues about the undesirability of sporadic violence. He himself has described in *The Philosophy of the Revolution* that as a young man he took part in an attempt to assassinate a politician guilty of betrayal of the nation. In detail he has described the preparations made for the assassination, the way shots were fired and the scene of wailing, crying and pathetic disorder prevailing soon after the shooting. The whole night he could not sleep due to the anguish caused by unnecessary violence. Peace of mind returned to young Nasser only when the next morning he learnt that their target was 'destined to live'.

Instead of indulging in terrorist activities the group concentrated more on underground political propaganda and even started distributing some revolutionary pamphlets written and produced clandestinely. To pay for the activities all of them voluntarily contributed an equivalent of two months' of their salary in the form of a loan, which of course was never repaid.

This meant a sacrifice for most of them. They belonged to ordinary middle or lower middle class families and had responsibility at home. Capt. Nasser, for instance, had been married in 1942, the year he came to Cairo, and was facing the problem of adjusting his patriotic urges and consequent expense within a tight family budget. His wife, Tahia, fully sympathised with his cause. She even came to his rescue by selling some family jewellery and disposing of some household effects.

## *Zionist Dagger*

To Capt. Nasser, however, more urgent and pressing problems had presented themselves as a big challenge. Apart from the deteriorating conditions at home and steadily slumping morale of national life all around, the biggest pangs of pain were caused by the impending usurpation of Palestine by the Zionists. Palestine by that time had become the greatest

symbol of Arab suffering as also of the brutal injustice done to their land by Western imperialism. No Arab could forget that till a few years ago Jews in that land had not numbered more than a mere three per cent of the population and it was only through the strongest pressure exerted by Zionist political and financial lobbies in countries like America and England that an alien community was being transplanted there under the pretext of creating a national home for the Jews. In the process the original inhabitants of the land were being dispossessed of their hearths and homes for no fault of their own except that they happened to belong to an Arab and an Asian soil.

The Arabs found themselves in a state of helplessness. They could hardly do anything to stop this conspiracy jointly foisted since the beginning of this century by Zionists and Western imperialists. The force behind it was, as Gandhiji said, 'naked strength of arms on the one hand and all the financial assets of the West on the other'. By the beginning of 1947 it had become clear that world powers, guided by power politics, were determined to go through with the aim of creating an alien state on the Arab land and were openly encouraging the Zionist terrorist groups, who with recruits from some of the most advanced nations, including serving members of the British and American armed forces, were driving out the Arab inhabitants. Britain was clearly backing out from all the solemn promises it had given, to protect the Arab interests till the very end.

At the United Nations, in spite of unanimous opposition from Afro-Asian members led by India, the Western Powers were frantically trying to push through in the General Assembly their resolution for 'the unholy partition of the Holy land'. In this state of utter helplessness the hearts of the young officers were naturally with the suffering Arabs of Palestine. Nasser himself remarked during one of his lectures in the Staff College in the spring of 1947 that if they had to fight in Palestine, it will not be a war in a foreign land but "the sacred duty of self-defence".

With the passage through the U.N. General Assembly of the so-called resolution of partition of Palestine, the repression by Zionist terrorists of the hapless Arab citizens was intensified.

The exodus of Arab citizens driven out even from areas not given to the so-called Jewish State under the United Nations resolution, assumed an alarming proportion. About a million refugees had been thrown out. In spite of the repeated indictments of an august personality like the U.N. Mediator, Count Bernadotte, who was later assassinated by the Zionists, neither the so-called State of Israel took to the ways of civilized behaviour nor did the United Nations heed to the repeated pleas by Asian countries like India, or the urgent requests from Arab countries to stop Zionist depredations.

In such a situation, intervention by the Arabs looked the only answer. The free officers also discussed this and decided to act. Nassar himself describes the situation in *The Philosophy of the Revolution* : "I remember one day, after the partition of Palestine was declared in September 1947, the Liberal officers held a meeting during which they decided to assist the resistance movement in Palestine. The next day I went to the house of Hadj Amin El Husseini, the Mufti of Palestine who lived in Zeitoun then. I said to him, "You need officers to direct battles, and to train volunteers. There is a great number of officers in the Egyptian Army who would like to volunteer. They are at your disposal any time you require." Hadj Amin expressed admiration of the spirit but he thought he would ask permission of the Egyptian Government before he said anything. He said to me, "I shall give you my reply after I have received the permission of the Egyptian Government". I went back to him after a few days. The answer he received from the Egyptian Government was "refusal."

The incident not only betrayed the incapacity of the conservative leaders to act according to the call of the situation, but also convinced the revolutionary officers that neither the liberation of Palestine nor the freedom of their own country could come through collaboration with the political elements outside the army.

Arab armies did however march in, but it was obviously very late. Israelis by that time had taken hold of most of the strategic positions even outside the areas which were allotted to them by the United Nations, and were firmly backed by a huge

supply of modern arms and trained soldiers from America and England. The Arab armies on the other hand ran into Palestine without any concrete plans. The contingent with which Nasser was, found itself at a place whose topography none of them knew. Nobody had even an idea of minor geographical details of the route they were supposed to pursue.

## *Tiger of Falouja*

It is amazing that in spite of this, the Egyptian army at first made an easy advance into those parts of Palestine which were awarded to the Arabs by the United Nations' plan. But jealousy, intrigues and general disorganisation among the High Commands of the Arab armies as reflected in the petty-mindedness of their Governments led the Egyptians to be isolated and at places encircled by the Israelis.

One of the places where an Egyptian battalion was encircled was Falouja, a post a few miles away from Gaza. A garrison held out there under total siege for four months.

The leader of the garrison was a 29-year old Major, Gamal Abdel Nasser. Twice he was wounded, once very seriously near the heart, a wound which could have caused instant death. The post held out and in the end was joined by some of his fellow-officers who, defying incessant Israeli fire, reached Falouja. It was there that for the first time the Government, the army and the press took notice of this young man. He was awarded two military honours,was hailed as the Tiger of Falouja by the Egyptian press, and was recognized as an up and coming officer by his colleagues.

According to *The Philosophy of the Revolution* it was at Falouja that the reality dawned upon Nasser that the real struggle was in Egypt. For protecting Arab interest anywhere in the world, it was imperative that Egypt was liberated from the twin-clutches of imperialism and feudalism. The fact that defective arms supplied to the Egyptian army through the machinations of greedy politicians, the monarchy and corrupt officers of the High Command were responsible, to a large extent, for the defeat, symbolised the unholiness of this alliance. Nothing could be done without getting rid of the components of this alli-

ance. Instantly Nasser realized that the struggle of all the Arab people was indivisible. But its starting point could only be in Egypt where the feudal imperial axis was at its strongest.

It is typical of Nasser that he did not confine himself to mere thinking and brooding, while lying wounded in battle. He immediately decided to put his thoughts into action. He had already started meeting informally like-minded young and patriotic officers. The nucleus he had created prior to the Palestine war proved to be handy in creating a secret society of free officers "El Dobbat El Ahrar". This was a clandestine dedicated body of men, whose single aim was the liberation of Egypt. The first meeting was held at Falouja. Under Nasser's personal guidance the organisation became so perfect that nobody knew about the time and the place of the meetings of the society unless a call came from 'Zaghloul'. The choice of the secret name Nasser had adopted for himself was not without significance.

In spite of all the secrcy and caution the news had leaked out to the High Command that the Major at Falouja was indulging in "undesirable activities". On return from the Palestine war he was, therefore, first called and was interrogated by General Osman el Mahdi, C-in-C of the Egyptian army. Nasser played cool and did not provide his boss with any cause for suspicion. Nevertheless complaints against him seemed to be strong and he was sent to the office of the Prime Minister Abdel Hadi Pasha. The Prime Minister interrogated him for full seven hours for "fermenting trouble in the army". But lack of evidence as also Nasser's own shrewd tackling of his interrogator, saved him from any action except a 'stern warning' that he should desist from such actions in future.

Perhaps it was as a mark of caution displayed by the Army High Command that instead of being put on active duty, he was re-posted in the Staff College as an Instructor. This proved of the greatest benefit to the Revolution. Not only did he meet many of his future comrades-in-arms, he was also able th remain in Cairo at the most crucial years precedin the Revolution.

While in Cairo he was able to know what was going on both on the right and the left of Egyptian politics. It soon became apparent to Nasser that however strongly might the civilian population desire a change, they were not clear at all how a change could be effected and what role the different groups, especially the army, could play in it. This realization strengthened his belief that "sick societies cannot be cured without rigorous doctors and drastic treatment". The doctor was to be the army and the treatment—Revolution. Why the army? Nasser himself had said that the only duty of the army was to die on the frontiers of the motherland. Why was it that Nasser wanted the Army to transgress its role and lead the affairs of the nation?

The answer today may seem fair and simple, since nothing succeeds like success. But the time when this role was conceived, a great deal of heart-searching had to be done. The reasons which led Nasser to believe that the role of the army in his country was essentially that of a deliverer and a liberator, were many and complex. The foremost among them was the fact that whereas officers in Europe and some other countries of Asia came usually from the conservative elements pledged to the maintenance of the *status quo*, the army in Egypt was perhaps the only revolutionary force. The officers were drawn mainly from middle and lower middle classes and were dedicated patriots. They were a compact group with discipline as their second nature, capable of putting their fealings into action, They were immune from the corrupt pressures of scheming politicians and could thus be relied to do their duty honestly and efficiently.

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# Cairo In Twilight

Early in 1950 Nasser was elected Chairman of the Free Officers' Society. It consisted of nine members all of whom were his close colleagues. The idea of the revolt was then mooted especially by the more emotional of the members of the group. But Nasser firmly stood against any premature action and got the date postponed at least by a year and a half. He firmly believed that good preparation must precede strong action.

Unlike many of the military conspiracies carried out successfully in a number of Asian countries, the Egyptian revolution was not the mere handi-work of a few scheming officers. While preparing for the revolution, the greatest stress was laid on underground propaganda. Officers' clubs, messes and homes were flooded with pamphlets urging them to stand up and fight for the liberation of the nation. It must have needed a masterly organisation to print and distribute such publications in great secrecy.

Let us now turn to the scene in the other camp. This was the camp of the Royalty, the gluttonous politicians and the scheming imperialists. Farouk, who on the beginning of his monarchical career, had evoked a good deal of hope from the people, was fast becoming a butt of ridicule. The only progress he seemed to be making was the pounds he was adding to his weight, the number of scandals associated with his name and multiplicity of the retinue of prostitutes, procurers and pimps around him. In the words of a contemporary historian, "Once the King's escapades into the naughty casinos and night clubs of Europe used to be received with amusing tolerance by the people and the press. Now they did not evoke anything except total disgust. When in Egypt, his only interest seemed to be in the Palace where a scheming clique of procurers and



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valets remined busy in organising entertainments for the King, bringing down governments and making senior army appointments."

It was commonly talked about in the highest circles in Cairo and Alexandria that the King's Nubian valet who did not know anything except "mixing of women with wine" was a more powerful man than even the Prime Minister and the Commander-in-Chief combined. There was an open talk of sale and purchase of Ministerial portfolios and titles of Pashas and Beys at huge and exhorbitant prices. The fact that no such deal could get through without the palace, from the valet to the King taking their share was widely known. As was remarked by an esteemed professor of Cairo University : "There was not a man in Cairo who, if he had a handsome wife and was of some consequence, was not afraid to take her anywhere where she might meet Farouk".

Meanwhile on October 1, 1951, under popular pressure the Government had announced the abolition of the 1936 Treaty which had granted the right to the British to keep a military base at Suez. But Britain declared its unilateral adherence to the Treaty.

The British arrogance gave birth to the demand that the Government should take an active part in the right to get the base vacated by the British. A great popular movement sprang up for the evacuation. It was the Government's apathetic attitude to this struggle which annoyed the Free Officers intensely and led them to believe that the time for action was fast approaching.

The crisis was precipitated in December, 1951 on the occasion of the election to the Executive Committee of the Military Club. Each year in December a meeting used to be held for the election of office-bearers of the club-positions which were considered to be of great individual importance for army officers and of significant political value for the Government. That year the King seeing the rising tide of the Free Officers' movement decided to put up a puppet General of his, Hussein Sirry Amer, for the Presidentship of the Club. The Free Officers decided to oppose this choice at all costs. This resulted in a trial of strength between the Society of Free Officers and

the Monarchy. Seeing that the Officers would win, the King indefinitely postponed the election. The Committee was bold enough to ignore the Royal Command and invited all officers to meet on the original date. The man whom the officers put up for the Presidentship was a well-respected soldier, General Neguib, who had previously been under the wrath of the King who had replaced him from a key army post through his puppet Sirry Amer. Being backed by the Society of Free Officers, Neguib was unanimously elected. The Executive Committee was also elected showing the great grip the Society had come to have on the minds of the army officers. Later, the King suspended the entire Executive Committee of the Club thus bringing the inevitable clash a step further.

In the meantime, the popular movement against the British forces of occupation in the Suez area started gaining new momentum. Egyptians resorted to all forms of non-cooperation against the forces of occupation including stoppage of drinking water to the British camps, economic and commercial boycott and severance of communications. At great personal sacrifice, 60,000 Egyptian workers withdrew from British camps, workshops and factories. Towards the end of November, 1951 improvised popular troops had begun their activities attacking British camps, seizing arms and ammunition and in short making life 'hell for them'.

The British retaliated by attacking demonstrators at Port Said and Ismalia with armoured cars and machine guns. Under the pretext of safeguarding their base, they occupied the two cities. The Egyptian Police Force joined the Commandos in the struggle. Police Headquarters at Ismalia strongly resisted the occupation of their post by the British. To curb their resistance the British bombarded Police Headquarters killing about a hundred policemen. The incident proved much more than the mere explosion of popular anger against the British.

For the Cairo mobs the battle of the Canal, nicknamed by Egyptian newspapers as their 'Stalingrad', opened the flood gates of an unprecedented fury and violence. Due to the most inept, pathetic and in fact criminal mishandling of anti-British demonstrations held in Cairo the next day, 26th January, the

Government confirmed its total inability to rule the country. The mob burnt and looted luxury shops, cinemas, Government offices, transport buses, banks and the clubs. This resulted into a loss of property worth millions of pounds as well as the lives of dozens of innocent citizens.

To complete the picture of mockery and criminal neglect, the King was seen witnessing the burning of Cairo from the second floor of the Abdin Palace. He was giving a banquet at the Palace and would not tolerate its interruption. While Farouk returned to the table and got busy with gossips about prostitutes of Paris and procurers of Beirut, his Prime Minister was visiting his manicurists and the Minister for the Interior was in a hurry to move a piece of furniture from the shop to the house he had just acquired. By the evening the tragically smoking ruins was all that was left of Cairo. The fires, however, also consumed the structure of the regime, the Society and the authority represented by Farouk and his entourage. 26th January, 1952 could thus be called the first day of the Egyptian Revolution.

From then onwards it was a futile struggle by the fast-dying monarchy, through ever-changing Prime Ministers and Governments to keep the tide of revolution as far away as possible. But the tide once unleashed could not be stopped. Events moved at an unprecedented speed in the days to come.

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# A Revolution is Born

July is the time when fever and Nile rise in Egypt. In 1952, a revolution replaced the fever and the rise of the Nile. Since the 'revelation of glaring emptiness" on January 26, the pace of fast-moving events seemed to have no respite. In a futile bid to stem the tide of history the King went on with his usual game of appointing and dismissing cabinets, as if the ministers were no more than his domestic servants. This however accelerated the process of decay and disintegration. By July that year, the talk of revolution was openly in the air, but nobody knew when it would come. This came on July 22, 1952.

Right from the beginning of July, Nasser had been making preparations for a peaceful revolutionary take over. Sitting in the frugal barracks of the staff college the details for final take-over on 5 August had already been finalised. But the date had to be pushed forward when he was informed by an Intelligence Officer that the King was planning an attack in the end of July by arresting most of the leaders of Free Officers' Movement. Nasser also learnt that on July 22, Chief of Staff had called an urgent meeting of Army Chiefs and the Council of War at General Headquarters to finalise details of action against Free Officers. Gamal Abdel Nasser received the news in his usual calm and quiet manner. "Good. It will save us time and trouble", he said. "We can take them altogether in one net instead of one by one from their homes." He gave the orders to attack G.H.Q. The zero hour was midnight July 22-23. The pass word was Nasr (victory) and the battle slogans – Revolution and Boldness.

Several witnesses have since then described how quiet and undisturbed the architect of the revolution remained through-

out. Next day, sitting in his office at the Staff College, he corrected several examination papers of cadets, while his important colleagues gave finishing touches to the details of the plan of action he had chalked out a day earlier. A fellow-officer later remarked that the only "suspicion" which Gamal's demeanour could give rise to, was his unusual calmness and a completely easy manner in discussing normal things of life till the afternoon of 22nd July.

It is indeed incredibly surprising that even that very night Nasser moved in his famous rumbling Austin unmindful of any danger to his life and mission. Escaping arrest twice during this eventful drive, he knocked at the doors of a number of colleagues of his and collected them for final action.

The battle for the Headquarters was won even before it began. Revolutionary forces led calmly by Major Abdel Hakim Amer captured the Headquarters and took the brasshats of the Egyptian Army meeting there, as their prisoners. The only casualties of the revolution were two guards, who had tried to resist, compelling the revolutionaries to exchange fire with them. This was the total resistance which the forces of feudalism could put before the revolutionary tide. Such was the authority of the revolution that many of the key points and military installations in remote areas were taken even through telephone orders. Simultaneously with the headquarters, the radio station and other important places in Cairo had been captured without a fire being shot. In the meantime, Alexandria was as swiftly taken over as was Cairo.

While the city of Cairo slept, the fate of Egypt had suddenly woken up after a slumber of centuries. In the early hours of the morning the leaders of the revolution had met in the headquarters and had approved the announcement to be made from the radio heralding the revolution.

Thus on July 23, 1952, at 7-20 a.m. after the first transmission of Radio Cairo had begun and had finished the recitation from the Qoran a turning point in the modern history of Asia and Africa was announced. Drafted by Nasser himself, this historic proclamation announced the take over by the Free Officers of the command of the army, but said nothing either about the government or the king. It however made it clear that

the army was responsible for law and order in the country, as the source of the real power.

Let us now shift the scene to Alexandria where the King on that fateful day had risen a bit earlier than the usual. He was suffering from indigestion for the last three days. Suddenly, some one put on the radio and along with the famous cool sea breeze of Alexandria, came the excited voice of the announcer requesting listeners to stand by for an important announcement. The king got startled. Then came the voice making it obvious that history of Egypt had taken a turn in which men like Farouk had no place.

Just at the time when he started sipping his morning fruit juice in the diamond studded cup, the architects of revolution had got busy discussing his fate. Though quite a few of his colleagues wanted Farouk to be tried and shot for being a traitor, Nasser was firmly of the opinion that the person of the King should not be touched and he should be immediately sent into exile.

Being an avid reader of the history of previous revolutions he knew that it was easy to start shedding the blood and difficult to stop it. He thus became the architect of a revolution which has been described the "whitest" of all the revolutions in the world.

An ultimatum was therefore drafted by Free Officers under Nasser's personal guidance, and was sent to the Prime Minister Aly Maher, who had been appointeed by the King to that office, on 23rd July on the demand of the Free Officers. Presented on the morning of July 26 by the Prime Minister, it demanded immediate abdication of Farouk, his departure within a period of 6 hours from the country, and the appointment of the infant Crown Prince Ahmed Fouad as the King. By that afternoon the world saw King Farouk, the so-called heir to the traditions of the mightiest of the mighty, humbly bowing before the will of the Egyptian people and signing the warrant of his own political death through his last official order.

Later the Revolutionary Council under the guidance of Gamal Abdel Nasser, issued its historic proclamation on June

18, 1953 putting an end to the monarchy in Egypt. The Republic of Egypt was thus proclaimed that very afternoon.

Thus was completed the process of the 'White Revolution" which has remained unmatched even till the present day due to its civility and respect for human life. The bloodless character of the revolution was all the more remarkable since the capture of power was the result of military strength.

While the revolution was busy entrenching itself, high ups in foreign circles in Egypt as also all over the world were still wondering who these people—"drinkers of soda without whisky", were? Their ways were complex and unfamiliar, especially to those who thought that luxury and power were inseparable blessings of Providence. For 27 centuries of civilized government in Egypt, the country had never seen a thing like this before. Still more surprising, they decided to remain in the bungalows in their barrack square, in preference to the pleasant villas of Zamalik where the Ministers of yesterdays lived. In exasperation a foreign ambassdor remarked in a diplomatic party, "Egypt today was being ruled by crude peasants in stiff uniform."

Nasser later noted that most of the members of the Revolutionary Council who took over from a corrupt and decayed monarchy had been professors at the General Staff College. This showed their intellectual bent of mind. They were all young men, the average age being 35—Nasser was 36, and were comparatively junior officers ranking from Captains to Colonels. Only Neguib who was practically an outsider and was merely invited to be a figurehead, was an elderly man.

There has been a great deal of discussion among contemporary historians and political analyists about the reason which facilitated such a swift change over. Many have said that it was due to the fact that Egyptians were always ruled by a Central authority. Others have advanced the theory that it was due to the excellent secret organisation Nasser had set up prior to the revolution. There are yet others who feel that indecision of foreign powers specially Britain and America helped revolutionaries consolidate their regime. On a deeper analysis, however, all these reasons appear to be superficial. For one thing, 'the indecision' of foreign powers was promoted

due to the fact that popular support to the revolution had made the situation absolutely hopeless for any intervention to succeed. Similarly, Nasser could not have set up such a perfect organisation in which he has not been betrayed even once, unless there had been an overwhelming sentiment for the total rejection of the old order.

As regards the argument of the so-called Central Authority controlling the whole of Egypt, the situation was not peculiar to that country alone. This was the case with almost every West Asian country. But whereas others failed, Nasser succeeded. The most plausible explanation for the success of the Revolution has been given by Nasser himself. He has said that "the forces behind the July Revolution were the people and not the guns and the soldiers. It was because of a unanimous popular approval that the revolution was both swift and successful."

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# Problems Of Infancy

"Lift up your head, Comrade, for the days of oppression are over". This was the slogan displayed everywhere in the streets of Cairo immediately after the Revolution. Days of oppression were indeed over.

Titles of Beys and Pashas which only a few months ago were considered a major Royal industry—most of them were bought at huge-prices, were summarily abolished. Similarly, the notoriously colonial practice of shifting Government headquarters to a cooler place in the summer, which, in the case of Egypt, was Alexandria, was given up. A large number of Farouk's supporters were purged from places of influence and the more important among them were interned. All this, however symbolic, touched only the fringe of the problem. The problem in Egypt was of abolishing feudalism which had been sucking nation's vitality from centuries.

Nasser himself has told us how immediately after the revolution he discussed this problem with all the important leaders of the country. Almost an open offer was made to any politician willing to implement a programme of the land reforms, to come and head a civilian Government. All of them including Aly Maher who was carrying on as a sort of care-taker Prime Minister, refused point blank. This was very strong disappointment for the man who had organised the Revolution, in the hope that, once the Army had completed the task, "the people" would take over the responsibility of running the Government, enabling the Army to return to the barracks." The disappointment emanated not merely from the cynical exposure of the political parties as protectors of vested interests, but also by the lack of political organisation capable of fulfilling urgent tasks of the revolution. With characteristic frankness, Nasser has

cribed his bitterness in *The Philosophy of the Revolution*, "I confess that after July 23rd I suffered fits in which I accused myself, my colleagues and the rest of the army of the rashness and folly we committed on July 23rd.

"Prior to that date, I imagined that the whole nation was on tip-toes and prepared for action, that it awaited the advance of the vanguard and the storming of the outside wall for it to pour down in a solid phalanx marching faithfully to the great goal. I thought we were only the pioneers and the commandoes, that we should only be in the front for a few hours, and that we would be soon followed by the solid masses marching to the goal.

"Aftet July 23rd I was shocked by the reality. The vanguard performed its task; it stormed the walls of the fort of tyranny; it forced Farouk to abdicate, and stood by expecting the mass formations to arrive at their ultimate object. It waited and waited. Endless crowds showed up, but how different is the reality from the vision. The multitudes that arrived were dispersed. Followers and leaders contrasted radically. The holy march towards the great goal was interrupted. A dismal picture, horrible and threatening then presented itself."

To move out of this frustraction, a drastic step was taken by disbanding the Provisional Cabinet. It was replaced by a Revolutionary Cabinet with General Neguib as the Prime Minister and Nasser as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for the Interior. The most revolutionary decision of the Revolution was annouced on 9th September, 1952. The Agrarrian Reforms Law promulgated on that historic day proved as important for the Egyptian Revolution as was the storming of the Bastille for the French.

Under it, individual land ownership was limited to 200 feddans and family ownership to 300 feddans. (A feddan is a little more than an acre). The law stipulated that surplus land was to be distributed among small farmers. With this step, one of the essential pre-requisites of "Clean Up", the early watchword of the Revolutionary Command Council, was fulfilled.

It was, however, realised that in spite of land reforms much remained to be done for implementing fully the famous three

solgans which Nasser had given immediately after the revolution. They were, Union, Order, Work. To translate these three slogans into action and reality, the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) drafted a declaration of six principles. They were—Destruction of imperialism, Establishment of social justice, Liquidation of feudalism, Organisation of a powerful army and End of monopolies and of domination of capitalism, and Establishment of a sound democratic system.

The question soon arose as to who should fulfil these tasks? Obviously, the Government alone could not do it. It needed a political organisation to back its revolutionary steps.

With that end in view, two steps were taken. The first was a virtual ban on political parties. The only exception was the Muslim Brotherhood. It was allowed to function on the assumption that it would devote itself to the task of religious preaching and Islamic reformation. Simultaneously, Nasser set up his first political organisation "The Liberation Rally".

## *Counter-Revolution Countered.*

But the Muslim Brotherhood did not feel content with the religious role it was supposed to play, and wanted to make General Neguib as a tool of its political ambitions.

Thus the Brotherhood whose role during the days of foreign domination and monarchical era was marked by glaring instances of opportunism, sabotage of national movements and even collaboration with agents of foreign imperialism, suddenly became the self-styled champion of anti-British sentiment. The idea perhaps was to capitalise on the people's opposition to the British occupation of the Canal zone and to force Nasser and his colleagues into extremist steps leading to a state of confusion and anarchy. The Brotherood made the evacuation agreement the RCC had concluded with the British, as its target of attack. We shall discuss this agreement later.

Under the pretext of protesting against the agreement, meetings were organised and student mobs were incited to indulge in acts of violence. In January, 1954, a serious clash took place between an infuriated mob of Muslim Brotherhood followers and a meeting of the Liberation Rally being held

nearby. The self-styled 'Brothers' not only attacked the meeting but also made a concerntrated attack on police vehicles burning and looting some of them. Seeing the danger to public security, the Brotherhood was proscribed and some of its important leaders put behind the bars.

Worse still, Neguib himself became increasingly identified with the "Brothers". He is on record rebuking members of the Revolutionary Command Council for banning the Brotherhood. In order to lift the ban, he demanded full powers of administration, which would have made him a dictator. Increasingly it became evident to the young members of the RCC that Neguib had started harbouring aspirations of personal power for the benefit of the most conservative and reactionary elements in Egypt and abroad.

Adding sinisterness to these manoeuvres, an arch reactionary like King Saud started openly pressurising the RCC to give 'real powers' to President Neguib. There was little doubt left now about the sources which stood behind Neguib. These suspicions were conclusively strengthened on the night of October 26, 1954, when a prominent member of the Muslim Brotherhood, Mahamoud Abdel Latif, fired eight shots at Nasser who by that time had become Premier, and was addressing a large audience in Alexandria.

As the shots were fired, Nasser dropped to the floor, then arose unscared and shouted in clear and ringing words, "If Gamal Abdel Nasser dies, now, he will be content, because every one of you will be another Gamal Abdel Nasser". The culprit had by that time been caught by the crowd, and handed over to the police. Nasser's cool courage was symblic of the iron will of the Revolution.

The trials of Latif and some of his friends which followed made shocking revelations. The main culprits including Latif and an important organiser of the Brotherhood, Duweir, not only pleaded guilty but made an open confession. They disclosed that they were planning to kill Nasser along with all other leading members of the R.C.C. A further sensation was created when Duweir testified, under a solemn oath, that Neguib had

aggreed to make a radio broadcast to 'calm the population', if the assassination of Nasser succeeded.

The proceedings of the trial fully convinced the revolutionary leadership that retaining General Neguib any longer in the Presidency could prove fatal to the Revolution. Subsequently on November 14, Major General Amer and Colonel Hassen Ibrahim went to the Abdin Palace which the President had taken as his residence, and escorted him. He was placed under house arrest at Marg, 30 miles from Cairo.

The post of the President was declared vacant. Nasser assumed his functions along with his duties as Prime Minister. In June 1956 he was elected President with 99 per cent of the electorate voting in his favour.

### *The Suez Sore*

On February 23, 1953, Nasser had given his famous slogan, "Colonialists should shoulder their batons and depart or struggle to death for their existence."

This was an ultimatum against the continued British occupation of the Canal zone area, the biggest military base of its time. Stretching for two-thirds of the Canal length, it covered an area of about ten thousand square miles. It had over 83,000 British troops, 50,000 tons of ammunition, three lakh tons of ordinance equipment, ten airfields and all the paraphernalia of a base of such magnitude, dockyards, warehouses and cantonments. Its building cost was estimated by John Gunther at $1.4 billion and it contained over $ 700,000,000 worth of supplies ; its annul expense to the British taxpayer has been calculated at $ 140,000,000.

Earlier Governments of Egypt had been unsuccessfully trying to get the base vacated. This failure only led to a sense of national frustration. Nasser whose hands had already been strengthened by an amicable settlement of the Egyptian Sudan problem through an agreement in 1953 confirming full Sudanese independence, was eager to get this "White sore" removed.

Nasser began with honest and sincere efforts to persuade the British to read the writing on the wall. Before the British

did so, they, along with Americans, tried their best to rope in Egypt into a defence pact. John Foster Dulles himself made a dash to Cairo and did a good bit of armtwisting. The fact that such pressures failed, speaks highly of the self-confidence, and political foresight of the young leaders of the Revolution who till then had no training in facing such complicated diplomatic manoeuvres. Nasser then decided on a "tough line' against the occupation forces. He inroduced a policy of complete non-cooperation. He restricted the movement of British personnel, intensified economic boycott, and cut water supply to the Suez base.

This brought Britain to its senses. On July 27, 1954, an agreement was signed between Egypt and Britain for a gradual withdrawal of British troops within a period of 20 months. While negotiating the agreement, Nasser decided to make a few concessions like the right of the British to recover the base if any of the NATO powers or Turkey was attacked These concessions, Nasser knew, were the minimum he had to make to get the British out, and he also realized that once Egypt regained control over its national territory, nothing could take it away from its grasp. It may be noted that during the negotiations Nasser got strong support from the Indian Government and the agreement was hailed by Mr. Nehru.

## *Thieves of the Baghdad Pact.*

No successful revolution has ever gone unchallenged by forces of reaction. The French Revolution had invited the wrath of the Kings of Europe who combined to crush it in an unholy 'Holy Alliance'. The Russian Revolution had to face united aggression from its neighbours in the period of its infancy. The Egyptian Revolution could not have gone unchallenged either. The antipathy of foreign imperialism became still more pronounced when it was realised that the Revolution had come to stay.

A system of Western military alliance had already taken shape in South East Asia in spite of opposition from non-aligned countries like India. In Western Asia, the groundwork for bilateral military pacts had already been completed by 1954 with Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and Iraq. This had provided

a nucleus for the so-called collective security alliance, later known as the Baghdad Pact. The United States had calculated that while Pakistan would serve as a leader of the non-Arab Muslim nations, Iraq under the leadership of that arch reactionary, Nuri El Said, could act as the main base of the West in the Arab world. Consequently, Nuri had made a long visit to Cairo during which he tried through every method of persuasion to rope in Egypt into the proposed alliance. Because of Nasser's categorical rejection of the idea, Nuri's mission ended in a fiasco. Nevertheless, the Baghdad Pact did come into formal existence in 1955. Nasser was to lead as strong a resistance to it as India was putting up against SEATO.

Keith Wheelock, a distinguished American scholar by no means friendly to Nasser, has remarked, "The Baghdad Pact marked major turning point in the evolution of Egypt's leadership. The revolutionary drive which had toppled the old regime and its supporting structure in Egypt, now turned out wards and 'Nasserism' became a driving force in the Arab world" (*Nasser's New Egypt*, p. 222.)

Simultaneously with the foisting of the Baghdad Pact a new pressure was brought to bear on Egypt. From the beginning of 1955, Israel started a series of raids on the adjoining Egyptian territory. The most serious of them occurred in February 1955. The so-called "provocation" for this raid was the execution in Cairo of two Israeli spies. Making this an excuse, the Israelis made a wanton and completely unprovoked raid on Gaza and bombared the hospital and the police port. The casualties to this barbaric action were more than 40 dead.

Following the raid, it became apparent that Egypt could take no risk with her defence preparedness. It became necessary to buy modern arms to face the danger. Nasser tried his best to buy arms from the United States. Jefferson Caffery, then American Ambassador in Cairo, in a testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee confirmed the fact "that in 1954-55 Nasser was eager to get military assistance provided it was without any conditions. But 'we had conditions'. The deal therefore fell. (Quoted by Keith Wheelock—*Nasser's New Egypt*, p. 229).

## *Delhi and Bandung*

It was against this background of Western Pressures to bring Egypt into cold war defence Pacts, the threatening posture of Israel, and the gathering clouds of counter-revolution in all the citadels of Arab reaction, that the invitation reached Nasser for attendlng the Bandung Conference. Among the five Asian leaders who had signed the invitation, at least one was not a stranger to Nasser. He was Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India, architect of Afro-Asian awakening and the propounder of the concept of non-alignment.

Nasser had met Nehru during latter's halt in Cairo in June, 1953. It was from that date that the concept of 'neutralism' as applied to the modern Afro-Asian community, made its first impact upon Nasser's young and agile mind.

His break of journey at New Delhi on way to Bandung proved to be of decisive importance. Nasser himself has often admitted that it was a landmark in his thinking. To this author, for instance, in an interview in Cairo Nasser had said : "My visit to India proved a turning point in my political understanding. I learnt and realised that the only wise policy for us would be of positive neutrality and non-alignment. Coming back home, I found out from the response it had evoked, that it is the only possible policy which could get the broadest possible support from the Arab people." *Tribune*, Ambala, April 27, 1958 also quoted by Keith Wheelak "Nasser's New Egypt", p. 230)

Addressing a mammoth public meeting in New Delhi on his first visit to this country, Nasser underlined this identity of thought, when he said : "Our two countries acting together can be an inspiring example of happy and fruitful co-operation to other nations of the world. Let us, therefore, rise to the occasion and not miss this unique opportunity." Earlier, on April 6, the bonds of friendship existing between the two peoples were strengthened by the signing, in Cairo, of a treaty of friendship. The growing co-operation between India and Egypt found a still greater expression at Bandung, where the imperialist stooges were defeated by the joint stand taken by the non-aligned countries.

At Bandung the world for the first time heard the authentic voice of New Egypt proclaiming not only its unbreakable solidarity with Asia and Africa, but also its resolute determination to fight all outside interference. The way elderly statesmen of this region were impressed by this young man from the land of the Sphinx making his first debut in an international gathering, was related to this author who was covering the Bandung Conference, by Jawaharlal Nehru at the end of the Conference. In an interview he told me that "among all the leaders, Nasser created perhaps the best impression. He is not only young and dynamic but has shown a great grasp over the intricate problems of world politics and has provided an invaluable support to all those who are working for peace and freedom of the area...Considering that it was his first experience in an international gathering, his role was perhaps the most remarkable and definately the most valuable from our point of view". (*Tribnue*, Ambala, April 26, 1955).

The popular ovation Nasser got on his return from Bandung, anywhere he went astonished every one. Simultaneously he had taken upon himself the responsibility for spearheading the struggle for North African Arab independence against French domination. Egypt became the strongest centre of support for the freedom struggle in the 'Mughrib'—Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. This endeared him still further to the Arab people struggling either for the attainment or for the preservance of freedom.

The Post Bandung postures of "the youngster from Beni Mor" annoyed and enraged the West. As a retaliatory measure they decided to put a so-called embargo on the supply of arms to Egypt. The reason given for this sinister move was the "anxiety" to keep the tension between Arabs and Israel in check. This did not however prevent the self-styled protectors of peace in West Asia from supplying a huge quantity of arms and ammunition to Israel.

7

# Sound, Fury And Fiasco

To a man of lesser calibre the pressure could have proved overwhelming. He would have come with a begging bowl knocking at the doors of the White House and 10, Downing Street. But Nasser was not made of that stuff. Having been disappointed by the West, he quietly turned to the East.

As Nasser has written in an Egyptian weekly, it was in May, 1955, that, at a diplomatic reception, he was approached by Mr. Daniel Solod, Russian Ambassador, who took him to a corner and asked him point blank whether his Government would be interested in the purchase of arms from the Soviet Union. "In the event of an affirmative answer he would inform Moscow... I answered in the same tone, that the suggestion appeared to me to be of great interest and I was ready to begin talks with that end in view." (Quoted by Jean and Simonne Lacouture in *Egypt in Transition*, p. 266).

In spite of this Nasser was keen to give the West another chance. On June 9, 1955, he told the American Ambassador that either "America gives us arms or we would get them from Russia." The same message was conveyed to the British. Both perhaps thought it was a bluff. They did not even think it necessary to acknowledge the request.

Having thus put the West thoroughly in the wrong, Nasser announced to a cheering crowd of Egyptians on September 28, 1955 : "The West refuses us the means of defending our existence. We have just signed a contract for the purchase of arms from Czechoslovakia." The announcement was greeted by a madly cheering crowd.

Obviously the West could not take this insult lying down. In retaliation came the threat that in case Egypt did not mend its ways, the West would back out from its promise of aid for building the Aswan High Dam. The High Dam, occupied the pivotal position in Egypt's dreams for a happy and a prosperous future. For over a quarter of a century Egyptian nationalists had toyed with the idea of raising this Dam to reclaim a substantial part of the desert occupying about 97 percent of Egyptian territory. It had been solemnly announced, though after a great deal of haggling and bargaining, that Egypt could count upon foreign assistance worth $270 million with the following break-up : $200 million to be given by the World Bank at 4 per cent interest, $ 56 million of grant from America and $ 14 million dollars of grant from Great Britain. West Germany, France and Italy had also announced their intention to help in building the High Dam.

In the meantime, pressure was brought upon Egypt for making an unequivocal declaration that it would never accept Soviet aid. Under French influence appraaches were made to Nasser to abandon the substantial support he was providing to the freedom struggle in North Africa. Britain insisted that the promised aid should be made a pretext for allowing her to reoccupy the Canal zone which it had eventually to vacate on June 23, 1956. Nasser categorically refused to do any horse-trading over the sovereignty of Egypt. He told John Foster Dulles pointblank that any aid without strings was most welcome. But he would rather let the High Dam project wait for a century if need be, than accept even a dollar, tainted with political conditions.

The language was too unfamiliar to those who had been used to hearing only requests, pleas and humble petitions from their stooges and hirelings. In a fit of anger which the Western politicians were to regret for years to come, it was announced on July 29, 1956, by John Foster Dulles that the United States was no longer prepared to take part in the High Dam project. A day later, Britain too had issued a similar statement. To complete the circle, the World Bank annouced the withdrawal of its offer on July 23, the fourth anniversary of the Revolution.

*Slap on the Face*

The day the American announcement was made, Nasser had just returned from Brioni in Yugoslavia after a week of discussions with Marshal Tito and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. On his arrival at the air port he was asked by reporters about his reaction to the withdrawal of this aid offer. In a tone full of confidence, he replied :

"The announcement has naturally upset us. Nevertheless, we shall find a way of building the Dam." Foreign journalists posted in Cairo at that time have written about the general speculation in diplomatic circles, "whether or not the Government would survive the death sentence imposed upon it from Washington." The more imaginative among them had even started discussing the lists of members of a Cabinet to be formed by Neguib on Nasser's fall.

Speaking four days later, on Revolution Day in Cairo, Nasser had warned America, "We will find some way of building the Dam, even if it kills you." This had set people thinking about the way Nasser was going to build 'the new pyramid of Egyptian glory'.

It has been a tradition with Nasser that he follows his Cairo speech with an address on July 26, the day Farouk went in exile, from Alexandaria. On July 26 that year, Nasser undoubtedly was expected to make a major policy statement while addressing the meeting. His reply to the manoeuvres of the West was both dramatic and dignified. After giving his listeners the background of the negotiations regarding the High Dam project and the importance the High Dam had for the future of Egypt, he briefed his people about the talks he had with the President of the World Bank, Mr. Eugene Black.

"Whenever Black spoke, I went back in thought to the year 1854 when Ferdinand de Lesseps told the Khedive, "We want to dig the Suez Canal. The Canal will bring you untold benefits.

"Egypt put up 40,000,000 dollars to help build the Canal, supplied forced labour to dig it and 120,000 workers died digging that canal...Britain forcibly took away from us our 44 per cent of the Company's shares. Instead of the canal being

dug for Egypt, Egypt became the property of the Canal Company."

Nasser told his audience that the Canal Company robbed Egypt every year of L.E. 35,000,000. Suddenly he declared : "That money is ours : Why don't we take it ? The Suez Canal is ours : We shall use that money to build the High Dam : We shall rely on our own strength, our own muscles ; our own money :

"In the name of Egypt, I, the President of the Republic, declare : "The World Maritime Company of the Suez Canal shall be nationalised : Citizens ; At this very moment, some of your brethren, are taking that company over. From this moment the Canal will be run by Egyptians,...:"

Commenting upon the confidence with which Nasser hit back upon London and Washington, two distinguished French journalists reported, "Rarely has a man been seen to undertake such a dangerous task with such a happy look on his face."

So, exactly four years after the exile of Farouk, Nasser had taken another step to complete the liberation of Egypt from political and economic domination.

## *"The Richest Ditch"*

The importance of this 106-mile long canal linking Port Said in the Mediterranean with Suez in the Red Sea was not merely strategic. It was, of course, true that without it the whole of Asia would be practically cut off from Western domination. During both the world wars the control of Suez had played a very important role in allied victory. But in spite of being a source of rich money, of great strategic value and of the utmost political importance to the British and the French, Egypt got precious little from the treasures it yielded. In 1955, for instance, the last year of Company's ownership, the total revenue obtained from the Canal by way of dues was £ 34,000,000. Only 9 million sterling were spent out of this on operating cost. A million pounds were charged as administrative expenses for the Paris Head Office of the Company. The share of the Egyptian Government came to a mere million pounds. The rest 23 million pounds went straight to the shareholders. The

manner in which this 'richest ditch in the world' was got hold of by the West is no less shocking and revealing.

A British writer has thus described the scene : "It was the 17th November, 1875. The Prime Minister, seated at the Chair of his desk, in his room in the House of Commons, was writing to the Queen, who was, as usual, at Windsor. A messenger stood nearby, for the letter was urgent as well as important : "The Khedive appears desirous of parting with his shares in the Suez Canal", Benjamin Disraeli wrote. "He says he must have 4,000,000 pounds sterling by the 30th of the month. Scarcely time to breathe : But the thing must be done."

Despatching the letter to the Queen, he sent another measenger to the City with a note to Mr. Rothschild, asking the financier to come and see him. He came the same evening and Disraeli, placing his cards on the table, showed him the Khedive's request adding : "I need the 4,000,000 pounds straight away." Rothschild said merely : "I will see what can be done, Sir". The following day he was back and told the Prime Minister, not without a touch of pride, "We have the money available". The two Jews shok hands. They had changed the course of history. For Britain was to become the owner of 353,504 out of the 800,000 shares of the Suez Canal Company. It was not a controlling interest, but it was the largest single block of shares and carried with it the right to appoint nine British Directors out of twenty-three, the balance being sixt French, five Egyptian, one American and one Dutch. (Gerald Sparow, The Sphinx Awakes, p. 95-96).

The way Khedive Ismail was made to 'need' the money is typically reminiscient of the 18th and 19th century methods of British imperialism *vis-a-vis* the ruling dynasties in India. Like the Nawabs of Oudh and the Nobles of Bengal, Banaras and Central India, the Khedive too was systematically tempted to spend beyond his means. He was first cajoled into granting all sorts of concessions to the contractors for building the canal and was given extravagant promises about the benefits which would accrue to the man who was considered among the richest men of his time. It was Ismail who had to foot the bill for the official opening of the Canal and was made to sign bills worth a

million pounds on that account alone. Together with his other habits of ruinous extravagance, he was encouraged by the cunning money lenders, he was obliged to sell his ordinary shares to Benjamin Desraeli.

So, far from being "an act of angry retaliation" as foolishly remarked by Dulles, nationalisation of the Suez Canal had become one of the great dreams of Egyptian nationalism which only Nasser could have turned into a reality.

If the reactions in Western Capital were bitter and hostile, the response in Asian countries was as favourable and forthright. Jawaharlal Nehru was among the first world statesmen to support the act by saying, "The Canal itself is in Egypt and an integral part of that country. The sovereignty of Egypt is thus beyond question."

In the meantime, hectic manoevres had started in London, Paris and Washington on how to force Nasser to retrace his steps. Eden has confirmed in his memoirs, that from the day Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal Company, they were convinced that without the use of force, nothing could be achieved to put the matter right.

With that end in view, a plot to pressurize Egypt through the force of arms had already got underway. Consequently, open threats started being doled out to Nasser 'to mend his ways ; otherwise reprisals would follow".

Condemning these threats, while speaking in the Lok Sabha on August 8, 1956 Jawaharlal Nehru represented the feeling of Asia and Africa when he said : "I would fail in my duty to this House and to the country and even to all the parties involved in this crisis, if I do not say that threats to settle this dispute or to enforce their views in this matter by display or us e of force is the wrong way. It does not belong to this age and is not dictated by reason. It fails to take account of the world as it is today, the Asia of today".

To give an appearance of respectability and some sort of international commitment, the Western Powers convened two conferences of the principal Canal users in London. There, in

spite of the strongest opposition from India, the Western Powers decided to send a so-called delegation consisting of their own stooges to persuade Nasser to revoke this decision. The mission under the leadership of the Australian Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, reached Cairo on September 3, 1956. As has been reported by an obviously hostile biographer of Nasser, "they found him confident and far from impressed by the fact that they spoke for the overwhelming powers in the world. According to the same source, Mr. Menzies told Nasser that he was empowered to discuss only the internationalisation of the Canal and nothing else. In a private interview he warned Naseer that the London Conference had not ruled out the use of force. Was he prepared to negotiate, or not ? Nasser's reply was a firm but dignified, "No". (Jodchim Joesten, Nasser : The Rise To Power p. 146)

## *Three-Pronged Stab*

It has been confirmed by a recently published diary of Moshe Dyan, the Israeli Commander-in-Chief and one of the main characters in the tripartite aggression against Egypt, that the conspiracy for a three-pronged attack against Nasser had been laid simultaneously with the convening of so-called conferences of Canal users.

Having failed in their attempts to cajole Egypt to revise her stand, England and France decided to embark upon naked aggression. Israel started unprovoked but systematic raids on Egypt. After a few incidents the Israeli Army started a large-scale aggression in the Senai area between the night of October 28-29. The Egyptian forces though completely ill-equipped as compared to the modern, sophisticated Israeli weaponary, fought like the best of soldiers. Scarcely 12 hours afterwards a joint Anglo-French note was delivered to Egypt shamelessly asking her to withdraw from the Canal Zone within twelve hours. "Otherwise", the note threatened blatantly, "Anglo-French intervention would be necessitated in such strength as necessary to secure compliance." The tone of the note was so barbaric and uncivilized that even a State Department official was reported to have remarked : "it is the most brutal ultimatum delivered in the modern history". (Quoted by Keith Wheelock in *Nasser's New Egypt*).

What was Nasser's reaction to this ultimatum? He pulled back his forces from Sinai, redeployed them along with the Suez Canal, and got prepared to face the aggression.

The Anglo-French action s te soon after Egypt's forthright rejection on Octobe: 30 of the Anglo-French. On October 31, British and French planes bombed Egyptian bases and swooped down on military bases systematically destroying anything of importance they could locate. Simultaneously the Israeli army made a massive move across Sinai. On November 5 at 8 a.m. parachutists dropped on the outskirts of Port Said and on Gamil Air Field to the West of the town. That very afternoon more men and heavy equipment were dropped.

The first force to come against the invaders were the brave people of Port Said. By the midnight of that fateful day, the whole population—civilians, soldiers, students and even children —had suddenly sprang up to offer the stiffest resistance any invader ever had to face from a civilian population. The fight no doubt had proved to be of the greatest cost to the lives and property of the defenders. But they fought in the spirit of a 12-year old boy who while dying from British bullets, had shouted, "The honour of the bricks of Port Said is more important than the blood of all of us."

Apart from the unbreakable will of the people, the factor which proved of decisive importance in defeating the aggression was the unanimous world public opinion against the aggression. In rousing the conscience of the world into a force of positive action, India has played a vital role.

This author still remembers the grateful smiles of school girls in Amman, the dignified thanks which President Nasser expressed, and the overwhelming feeling of gratitude expressed by every Arab whom he met from Basra to Aswan about the leading role India had played in organising the world opinion against the aggression. As a result of all such efforts including the convening of a conference of five Colombo Powers in New Delhi, on November 1, the United Nations General Assembly was called into the first special session in its history.

Voting by an overwhelming majority (64 to 5) the Assembly urged all parties now involved in hostilities to agree to an

immediate cease-fire. This resolution had been introduced by the United States after Great Britain and France on October 30 had vetoed a cease-fire resolution of the Security Council, which too had been introduced by America.

## *The Great Fall*

On November 5, 1956, came the turning point in the conflict. On that day British and French paratroopers had landed in Port Said. The U.N. General Assembly on the same day voted by 57-0 to establish an International Police Force to try to end the fighting and appointed Major General Burns of Canada as Commander-in-Chief for the proposed post. It was in that force that India, on a specific request from Egypt, sent a strong contingent which later became the predominant part of the International Police Force.

Also, on the same day, the Soviet Union announced that unless the aggression stopped forthwith, it was prepared to use force to crush the aggressors and restore peace in Egypt. The following day the cease-fire was proclaimed over the entire area at midnight of November 6.

Confusion and fiasco now overtook the aggressors. It has been noted that after the invasion Whitehall and Hotel Matignon waited for a telephone call from Cairo to say that the Egyptian people had come to their senses, overthrown the dictator and accepted the internationalisation of the Suez Canal. (Jean and Simonne Lacouture, *Egypt in Transition*, p. 482).

Right from the beginning Eden and Mollet had made it clear that their main target was neither the Canal nor Egypt itself, but Gamal Abdel Nasser. Eden had said so in so many words in a Parliament speech when he remarked that our fight was with a dictator and not with the Egyptian people.

To achieve the aim of overthrowing Nasser, the aggressors had put up over a dozen open and clandestine radio stations, beaming all the hours of night and day to the ears of Egyptian people the familiarly embarassing grouse of dying imperialism. Desmond Stewart in his *Young Egypt* has quoted one such broadcast: "Oh people of Egypt: this evil thing has come

upon you for that Gamal Abdel Nasser went mad and nationalised the Suez Canal...Keep out of the streets or we will throw a bomb at your heads...You have seen how our soldiers kill by day, soon you will see how they will kill by night too :"

What was the result of this psychological warfare? Nothing, except that it befooled those who were indulging in it. In Cairo, for example, a British Embassy official, a Councillor to be exact, who claimed excellent relations with the topmost people in the city, had sent his dragoman to the Bank to get some money. When the dragoman came back, the excited official asked, "Have they begun?" "Have what begun?", asked the dragoman. "The demonstrations against Abdel Nasser." But to his great surprise and utmost regret everyone had been going about with his work as usual. So much so, that not a soul among the English and the French living in Egypt was touched or harmed in any way.

More remarkable still was the fact that even though Port Said had lived for 45 days under occupation, the forces of aggression could not find a single Egyptian collaborator.

Later on, everyone could remember with pride that even though the people had been armed by the State to defend themselves without any discrimination of ideology, class or inheritance, not a single case of defection was found. Surely if Nasser had been a dictator as alleged by the upholders of vested interests, these people would not have returned those weapons to the Government when the emergency ended. Isn't it surprising that during and even after the aggression the price index in Egypt did not register any variation compared with the pre-invasion days. In fact prices of a few items fell since there was less demand for them.

The Suez episode indeed marked the final confirmation of the fact that the Revolution had come to stay. While Nasser, whom the British War Minister had the impunity to call an 'Inexperienced upstart in khaki', not only survived and became a force to be reckoned with in world politics, Eden got mad and 'broke his crown', alongwith Guy Mollet, the socialist-imperialist who was disgraced in a similar manner. After this great fall, the Hampty Dumpty of white imperialism could never be the same again.

8

# Blossoms in the Desert

July 23 has been called a Revolution of uniformed peasants. With the background of middle and lower middle class rural life most of the officers shared, this is not an inept description. It was, therefore, not surprising that the first step the Revolutionary Council wanted to take was the implementation of a programme of land reforms. As we have already seen, it was due to the political parties' inability to implement this programme that the path of parliamentary democracy based on a multiplicity of political parties had to be abandoned, and new democratic institutions suited to the particular needs of the Egyptian peoplo set up.

Gamal Abdel Nasser began with the conviction that nothing tangible could result by way of progress unless 80 per cent of the Egyptian population living in the thatch-roofed mudhuts could be liberated from feudal exploitation. While 2,000 big land owners had more than 2 million acres, over 8 million peasants owned only three quarters of a million acres of land. With over two million landless peasants tied to the yoke of unproductive agriculture, it was the slavery of 75 to 80 per cent of the population to an old and discredited system of exploitation.

To harness the energy of this mass of people for building a new Egypt, the first step was taken on November 9, 1952 by promulgating the first land reforms law, fixing a ceiling on individual land ownership to 200 feddans and that of a family to 300 feddans. It also provided for surplus land being distributed to landless peasants. The law also regulated the rent paid by the tenants and the price of the land was fixed in proportion to land taxes. With these measures one million feddans or 80% of the entire agricultural land, were distributed among landless people after being taken over from the landlords.

President Nasser was wise enough to foresee the danger of counter-revolutionary tendencies being fermented in the villages by the once, all-powerful land owners who had been dispossessed of their right to unlimited exploitation. To face this danger, both positive and negative measures were taken. On the negative side, some 7,000 persons affected by the agrarian reforms programme were deprived of political rights. This helped in isolating these people from the mainstream of revolutionary reconstruction.

On the positive side, measures of much greater magnitude were implemented. As a first step, the Revoluationary Command appointed a Land Reforms Committee. Headed by a member of the R.C.C., this Committee was given the responsibility of supervising the successful implementation of the programme. Apart from the general powers with which the Committee was equipped for safeguarding the interests of the peasants and fighting any possible danger of sabotage by the ex-landlords, it was provided with one million pounds of credit from the National Bank of Egypt. The credit helped the Committee to buy seeds, implements, manure and fuel which the peasants could not easily get.

Nasser himself took the keenest interest in the programme. He made a whirlwind tour of Egypt from the North to the South, from Upper to the Lower Egypt. During the tour he addressed hundred of meetings of peasants and handed them the land deeds.

Apart from this personal supervision, much stress was laid on the creation of a vast system of village co-operatives. These were provided not only with facilities of credit but also with powers to have their own tube wells, tractors etc. whose benefit was to be shared by all members of a co-operative. They had the power to establish schools and hospitals, make lighting arrangements for villages, and build roads and houses. A pyrimidical structure of such cooperative societies is being built to co-ordinate the activities of all such societies through a system of democratic election and central control.

Early in 1962 some fresh measures were taken towards the land reforms programme. Consequently all the agricultural

land held by foreigners was taken over. This affected 2616 owners with a total holding of 141,000 acres. The land ceiling was also reduced to 100 acres per family. This ended the possibility of big farmers replacing the landlords of the past. As a result 265,000 families of landless peasants were able to receive on an average five acres of land.

A UNESCO survey conducted by American research scholars has revealed that taking 1953 as the base of prices, the income of peasant families in Egypt has risen from less than Rs. 365 to about Rs. 3,400 per year (according to the pre-devaluation rate of exchange). The law has also taken good care of the rights of the agricultural labourers whose minimum wage has been fixed at about Rs. 4 per day.

Almost every village has been provided with clean drinking water. In a land where women had to walk miles to fetch a pitcherful of muddy water from a lake or spring, this is no small blessing.

## *Virgin Soil Upturned*

However revolutionary the programme of land reforms was, it was soon realised that the stress on a mere change in system of ownership was not enough. The real problem was to augment the availability of land for agriculture. On the face of it, this did not look very difficult. Out of Egypt's total area of 386,198 sq. miles which is about 45 per cent of the total area of India, the land under cultivation did not amount to more than one and a half per cent. It was, therefore, tempting to feel that the bounties of the Nile, whose gift Egypt was supposed to be, could be stretched manifold and the problem of paucity of agricultural land solved.

But more than 96 per cent of this area was desert. Almost the entire population of Egypt was living on less than 4 per cent of the land. The pressure on land was increasing every year as the population was growing at the rate of more than two per cent. Throughout the last decade and a half, the population has been rising by over half a million every year, making the present total around 30 million people.

It was, therefore, imperative that not only land reforms were implemented properly but also new avenues for augmenting

agricultural production were found. The great stress put on agriculture was also due to the fact that Egypt's largest and most profitable industries are dependent upon agriculture. They include cotton spinning and weaving along with food processing. Between themselves these industries represent more than 50 per cent of Egypt's industrial output.

Obviously steps had to be taken to liberate as much of land from the clutches of the desert as possible. In a later chapter, we shall discuss how a gigantic effort is being made to harness the energy of the "Roaring white horses of the waters of the Nile," for the benefit of the people of Egypt. This is being done through the construction of Sad-EI-Aali, the Aswan High Dam, once described by Eugene Black, former President of the World Bank, as the "greatest construction project ever conceived by man." Before we turn to this ambitious and gigantic plan to use the bounties of nature for human benefit, let us have a look at the efforts at reclamation of land which have marked the last ten years of agricultural planning in Egypt,

Beginning with 1955, gignetic efforts were made to bring as much area under the plough as possible, especially in the areas adjoining the Nile and the Delta. Through these efforts an area of over half a million feddans, about 40 per cent of the total cultivable area before the Revolution, were reclaimed.

The water from the High Dam has started flowing into half-a-million acres ; another half-a-million acres will be reclaimed under the current second Five-Year Plan. The target is that, by the end of 1972, Egypt should have as much new area under cultivation, as it had at the time of Revolution. An integral part of the reclamation programme is the systematic encouragement being given not only for the adoption of modern methods of agriculture, but also for the construction of rural communities on an entirely new set up based on modern techniques. Consequently, under the second development plan, new farms are being set up in an area of 4,000 sq. miles benefiting over a million people.

While implementing the programme of land reforms, Nasser had realised that the biggest incentive to the peasant

would be a guarantee that nobody was going to take away the land he was cultivating with his sweat and labour. He has therefore been very careful in declaring emphatically that the present system of peasant proprietorship of land will continue in the Arab Socialist system.

He has however made it clear that by 1970 the maximum land ownership not only of an individual but of a family which includes husband, wife, minor children and dependent parents, would in no case exceed 100 feddans. To supplement this system of land ownership an effort is being made to enlarge the cooperative sector. The agricultural bank, for instance, has been transformed into a cooperative bank, with branches all over the rural areas, having adequate resources for providing financial loan, fertilizers, insecticides etc. to the cooperative societies, which, in turn supply them to the peasants, along with technical and scientific guidance and know-how.

The effect all these measures have had on agricultural production are indeed phenomenal. The per acre yield of cotton, for example, was only 4·21 cantars in 1952, today it is nearly 7 cantars. This has resulted in a three-fold increase in the production of cotton. Similarly, in the production of rice, almost a double increase has been recorded, making Egypt as the third largest producer of rice in the world. India is at present the biggest importer of Egyptian rice.

The export of other agricultural products has also been rising. For example, exports of cotton yarn and fabrics have risen from less than Rs. 21 crores in the year of Revolution, to over Rs. 77.7 crores in 1965.

Inaugurating the Ministry of Land Reforms in a portion of the Abdin Palace, Nasser had said that success or failure of the Revolution would depend on the effectiveness of the land reforms programme. The past fourteen years have shown that his faith in the importance of this venture has been fully sustained. No Revolution in the world has been as smooth and successful as has been his.

9

# Glory of Today – Hope of Tomorrow

The history of Egypt since 1954 has revolved round three proper names—Nasser, Suez and Aswan.

The Suez was, of course, very much there when Nasser took over. The prominence the Canal got was due to the fact that it was Nasser who liberated it and made that liberation the symbol of the end of the colonial era in the East, just as its construction had signified the beginning of the era of modern imperialism.

No doubt that liberation was inevitable. Sooner or later, it would have come. But obviously if the problem of the construction of the High Dam had not been there, the drama of nationalisation would not have assumed the importance it did.

The Aswan High Dam thus became the pivot around which the history of post-revolutionary Egypt has revolved. Its tremendous effect, which in the words of the *Life* Magazine, "is the noblest justification for co-existence", on the world politics cannot be over-emphasised. It was through this breakthrough that the Soviet Union was able to enter the economic life of many developing nations.

Nasser was right when he called the "Saadel-Aali" Arabic name for the High Hish Dcam—"the glory of today and the hope of tomorrow." The magnitude of this glory has been echoed by Dr. K. L. Rao, India's Minister for Irrigation and Power. In a survey of the project after a visit to the Dam site, Dr. Rao had written in 1964, "The Nile, the lifeline of Egypt and the Sudan running for 6,500 k.m. (4,039 miles) from its source in Central Africa to the Mediterranean, is one of the longest, most bountiful rivers of the world. But for this vital

artery, Egypt and Sudan would be as lifeless as the bordering Sahara."

After describing the origin of the scheme which has been a dream of Egyptians for half a century and also the construction of the Aswan Dam in 1902, near which the present High Dam is being raised, Dr. Rao made a comparison of the capacity of the High Dam with many of our own river projects. How gigantic is this 'super-ambitious project of Nasser', is evident from the comparision which Dr. Rao has made. "The Rihand, the Nagarjunasagar and the Bhakra Dams of India will rank among some of the very large projects in the world. But the storage of 5,544,403 million cubic feet of the High Aswan Dam will dwarf the pooled storage, not only of the three major projects in India but will exceed the total of all our major projects. Egypt is building a reservoir which will practically stave off drought years for the millions of acres commanded by the Dam.

"Compared to the Aswan High Dam's capacity of nearly 127.3 million acre feet, Bhakra can store 7.4 million acre ft., Nagarjunasagar 9.3 million acre ft. and the Rihand 8.6 million acre ft. The capacity for power generation of the High Aswan Dam is no less stependous. Twelve units of 175,000 k.w. will have an installed capacity of 2.1 million k.w. This will be further augmented by linking the High Aswan hydrostation with that at the old Aswan Dam lower down.

"The three and a half mile long, half a mile wide and 350 feet high pyramidical structure of the High Dam will be 17 times bigger than the biggest of the pyramids built five thousand years ago."

On hearing of the western withdrawal of the aid offer, Nasser had said : "If our forefathers could have built the pyramids without bulldozers and cranes, we could surely build the High Dam, if need be, with our hands." Even before the offer of Soviet aid had crystallised and the Soviet Union offered to underwrite the foreign exchange required, Nasser had made it clear that, come what may, the Dam would be built.

His anxiety to build the High Dam is explained by the fact that while the total foreign loan incurred for building the

project is not expected to exceed about 900 crores of rupees, according to the current exchange rate, the income per year it is expected to yield will be to the tune of 400 crores of rupees. This means that all the loans could be paid back in two fully productive years.

It may be asked from where this income is likely to come. The answer lies in the fact that High Dam will not only harness water which runs into the sea but would also regularise the flow of water at all times of the year. The two million acres of land which will be reclaimed with the water of the dam will be more than the total area of the agricultural land in pre-revolutionary Egypt. These two million acres will absorb at least half a million agricultural families, which means at least two and a half million to three million people. In agriculture alone Egypt will be able to double its production as compared to the pre-revolutionary days. The benefits of the Dam would however not be confined to agriculture alone.

An integral part of the scheme is to provide ten million kilowat of electricity per annum. The power plant will comprise twelve units generating electricity, two of which will be in working order by the end of 1967 and the other ten will be ready by the end of 1968. Cheap electric power thus obtained will prove invaluable for the development of industry.

Based on this contribution alone, at least 30 industrial projects have been completed to get into operation as soon as the power becomes available. These include an iron and steel unit with a potential output of 3,20,000 tons per annum, an an aluminium plant with a capacity of 40,000 tons and other units for the annual production of six thousand tons of ammonium nitrate, and 490 million sand bricks.

On May, 14, 1964, the completion of the first stage of the construction was marked by a dramatic inauguration which was as colourful as it was significant.

An eye-witness to the scene, R. K. Karanjia, Editor of the *Blitz*, has thus written about this ceremony :

"On the torid, dusty summer afternoon of the 14th of May, 1964, the earth shook to the thunder of mighty explosions which

changed the course of the River Nile for the first time in history to raise from the belly of Africa the prodigious infant of the Aswan High Dam. Four thousand miles from its source in the central highlands of the great continent, the explosion had been touched off by four leaders, not only harnessing thereby the wild, foaming 'white horses' of the turbulent Nile in the service of the revolution, but also changing the course of the history of Afro-Asia.

"The fingers on the button were those of the UAR President Gamal Abdel Nasser and the then Soviet Premier, Nikita Khruschev, assisted by the then Iraqi President, Abdul Salam Mohammed Aref, and the Yemeni President, Abdullah Sallal, symbolising the climatic fulfilment of Arab-Soviet cooperation; and the explosion blasted a temporary coffer dam, opening up a man-made canyon a mile-and-quarter in length, 200 feet deep and 100 yards wide. This canyon is the diversion channel which carries the waters of the River Nile in a sweeping arc to bypass the site of the Aswan High Dam to make way for the construction of the Greater Pyramid of the Nasser Revolution". (R. K. Karanjia, in "*How Nasser Did It*").

The first stage of the construction thus been completed, the entire work is expected to be finished by 1970. So, on the banks of the Nile which have already seen in the last five thousand years the rise and fall of the mightiest of kingdoms, a new history is being written with the sweat and toil of the Egyptian people.

At a place which had once been the favourite resort of legend-hungry aristocrats, international vagabonds and pleasure-seeking tourists, the work is going on with more than a lakh workers building something which could dwarf most of the wounders of construction and high buildings of our age.

The Aswan was once famous for its Nubian temples and awe inspiring statutes and Abu Simbal, the birthplace of Cleopatra and the Fatmide mosque at Belan. It has now become a place of pilgrimage for all those who have respect for national independence and faith in people's capacity to defend it.

10

# A Pyramid of Social Justice

July 23, 1952 was an end and a beginning. It marked the end of an era of economic and political exploitation. The Revolution also signified the transformation of Egypt from a decadent medieval country to a dynamic and modern one.

To make that beginning was not easy. There existed a complete political vacuum in the rural areas. On the contrary, in the cities there was an excess of petty political manoeuvring based on the most cynical disregard of personal and social ethics by politicians whose only virtue seemed to be their capacity to manipulate votes at the time of election and to get round the palace through shady deals.

The climax to this decadent cynicism of the politicians, working under the umbrella of socalled parliamentary institutions, came immediately after the Revolution. When invited by the Revolutionary Command Council to form a civilian Government with a radical programme of economic reforms, all of them refused and thus wrote off their own future.

Nasser was, therefore driven to the inescapable conclusion that political parties in their conventional sense had no place in revolutionary Egypt. Consequently on January 16, 1953 political parties were abolished. A week later, the first popular organisation was formed through a revolutionary decree. This was the Liberation Rally (Hayit Al Tahrir). It was created to struggle against the forces of foreign occupation stationed in the Suez area. The L.R. ended with the fulfilment of this purpose.

The next phase in building a mass party was the National Union. Under the Provisional Constitution, it was set up as a "popular democratic organisation ready to accept every one

without exception and without any discrimination." It was an effort for total popular mobilisation. But soon it became apparent that the NU suffered from some basic weaknesses. The most important defect was that the exploiting classes could not be brought into a fruitful alliance with the workers. Nasser boldly admitted this mistake. So, the Arab Socialist Union was initiated, instead.

The National Charter about which we shall talk a little later, has thus defined the role of the Arab Socialist Union. "The Arab Socialist Union is the popular political organisation in the U.A.R.

"It is the socialist vanguard which guides the masses, expresses their will, directs the national action and controls its implementation in conformity with the principles of the Charter.

"It is melting pot of all the people's demands and requirements.

"The Arab Socialist Union comprises the working forces of the people, namely, the farmers, workers, soldiers, intellectuals and national capitalism. In addition, it respresents the alliance of these forces within the framework of national unity."

It has been made obligatory in the code of the Arab Socialist Union that representation of the workers and peasants at all levels of the organisation should be at least fifty per cent. Since its inception, the A.S.U. has come to comprise over 60 lakh members of which 250,000 are women. In the basic unit election, nearly 22,000 members of which about 2,300 women were elected to 700 units, which represent the popular base of the Union. From these units are elected district and town councils, then governorate councils, which in turn elect the central executive council of the Union.

Nasser has been emphatic in impressing upon the members of the A.U.S. that they must fulfil the basic demands expected from popular leadership. While addressing members of the Executive Bureaux of the AUS in February 1966, he said: "The basic needs expected from the leadership of a revolutionary political organisation working in a democratic socialist

set up were three, namely, (1) There must be continual contact with the popular base. This should be done on all levels through cooperation with the local ASU authorities and with the level of Central authorities in the State. Secondly, ASU members should have an ideal personal behaviour. Thirdly, there must prevail absolute confidence and trust between various ASU organisations. He was frank enough to say that, "in many matters he has so far found ASU working insufficient."

The Arab Socialist Union cannot, except superficially, be compared to the single party systems prevailing in many Afro-Asian countries today. As Nasser himself has pointed out, in contrast with these countries, there is complete freedom of constructive criticism in the UAR. Moreover, he considered it it wrong for the Revolution to have a small limited party. The ASU is, therefore, more of a popular national front than a political party.

Arab socialism, the ideology of the ASU, could be called a combination of idealism and pragmatism. It is anchored on respect for the individual and for his freedom.

The respect for people's freedom is reflected in the fact that the press, in spite of being 'depersonalised' from the hands of private ownership, has neither been brought under the state ownership nor under the State control. The newspapers are run by workers' cooperatives, functioning under the direction of Arab Socialist Union. These cooperativcs. operate like any business organisation where workers themselves own and manage their firm.

On the issue of freedom of the press, Nasser's views have been clear and categorical. He has, for instance, said: "Except for the adherence to the principles of the National Charter, no restriction or control is imposed upon the press. The press must perform its duty to the nation on the basis of freedom and free-thinking. We must accept opinion no matter how multifarious, on one condition that they do not clash with the basic revolutionary aim. For example, it is absolutely out of place to demand the return of the reactionary regime, or alliance with any particular bloc in the

world. Apart from safeguarding these fundamental principles, no restriction should be imposed on the Press which must reflect most honestly all Arab hopes and aspirations." (Talk to the members of the Parliamentary Commission of Arab Socialist Union *Arab Observer*, March 8, 1965).

About the system of ownership of means of production and creation of wealth, the National Charter has been emphatic that this should never be left in the hands of those who make it an instrument for exploitation. Putting the objective into practice, 80 per cent of the UAR economy can be called either State-owned or State-controlled. But at the same time individual initiative and enterprise has not been smothered. The Egyptian farmer, for instance, remains the master of his own land. Similarly small retail trade as also small industries have been left in individual ownership though cooperative ventures are encouraged.

To quote Nasser again: "Our socialism is a combination of social justice and economic efficiency. It represents the freedom of man and the citizen, the abolition of all forms of exploitation, popular control over means of production, democracy and freedom from any form of class control. It is neither copied from any dogma nor from any experiment abroad. Even the ex-owners of firms are provided jobs on their very firms, in many cases on the Board of Directors. Similarly, Communists who had been under a cloud have been provided with jobs in many responsible places."

The National Charter has laid down a time limit for the fulfilment of the Revolution's socialist aims. This is the year 1970. The Charter differentiates between two kinds of private property, one meant for personal profit alone and, the other for serving the national economy and private interests at the same time. While the former is being eliminated, the latter is encouraged, in every possible way. The public sector concerns are run by Board of Directors, and workers' representatives are included in them. It is obligatory that there should be at least four representatives of workers on every Board of Directors and 25 per cent of profits should go to the workers. This ensures not only adequate participation

by the working people in the nationalised ventures, but also a sense of belonging to the organisation. This accounts for the generally satisfactory performance of the Egyptian popular Sector undertakings. There is however constant attempt to find out defects and bottlenecks in the management of the nationalised industries and to remove them. The current second plan lays great emphasis on better management of the public sector economy.

## *Egyptian Magna Carta*

Let us know have a closer look at the Charter, which has rightly been called the Magna Carta of the Egyptian people. This was presented to the Nation on November 31, 1962 by President Gamal Abdel Nasser through the National Congress of Popular Forces representing the people, both area-wise and profession-wise. The Charter was approved by the members of the National Congress as a guide for 'revolutionary action'. Consisting of 10 chapters and 160 pages, it can be called a comprehensive guide-line as well as a blueprint for the new socialist society Nasser wants to build in Egypt.

In the beginning, the Charter underlines three objectives of the new society. These objectives have been summed up as Freedom, Socialism and Unity.

These three objectives have been thus defined : "Freedom stands for the country's liberty and the citizens' liberation from the political, economic, social and human points of view.

"Socialism means establishing a society in which sufficiency justice, social services and equal opportunities prevail. Unity is the aspiration of the entire Arab nation, from the Arab Gulf to the Atlantic Ocean."

About foreign policy, the Charter makes it imperative on the State to follow non-alignment as the basic philosophy in foreign relations. "Today" the Charter says, "the prevalence and acceptance of this concept in many countries of the world is a great tribute to the faith of our people in serving peace. The first call for convening the first conference of non-aligned States came from Cairo and met with wonderful approval by many people. It was at the same time a human tribute to the

route we had followed in the service of peace, in which we firmly believed."

Talking of more specific issues, the Charter lays particular stress on the problem of Arab Unity. Evidently unity of the Arab people is one of the foremost objectives of UAR foreign policy. But the Charter has let it be known that Nasser does not believe in any mechanical application of this concept to the existing Arab situation. "The concept of unity", says the Charter "no longer requires a meeting of the rulers of the Arab nations and show solidarity among the Governments. The unity of objective is a substantial factor for the popular base in the entire Aarb nation. Arab unity is not a uniform constitutional form that must inevitably be applied. It is rather a long path with several stages leading to the ultimate aim."

The Charter affirms belief not only in Arab unity but also in the pan-African movement and in Afro-Asian solidarity together with faith in the United Nations and its ideals. It says in this regard, "Our people live and struggle for the sake of the sublime human principles which the people inscribed with their blood in the UN Charter. Many clauses of this Charter were inscribed with the blood of our people, as well as that of others."

One of the biggest contributions of Nasser to Arab thought is secularism. This finds an all pervasive expression in the whole of the Charter. Nasser himself has said it often that however strong his faith may be in the Quran as a Revealed Book, it is impossible to apply those tenets into a concrete form as far as the state policy is concerned.

The Charter, for instance, while guaranteeing complete religious freedom, makes no mention of the superiority of any one religion over others. On the contrary, through the Charter it has been made known that the secular policies of the State must govern even such fields as family relations and the equality of sexes. It makes it imperative on the State to promulgate such laws as would guarantee complete equality for women "shedding all the remaining shackles that impede her free movement."

Laying the greatest stress upon increasing production as a means to building a happy future for the Arb people, the Charter concludes : "The Arab man has acquired his right to fashion his life through revolution, and that he shall determine by himself the destiny of his nation in the fertile fields, in the huge factories from the top of high dams, and with the enormous energies of the driving power, and asserts that the battle of production is the true challenge in which the Arab man will justify his worthy position in the sun."

The Revolution Nasser has brought about stands upon three equally important ladders of socialism, positive neutrality and democracy which includes a strong faith in secular ideals as opposed to religious fanaticism. We have already discussed the concept of positive neutrality and socialism along with the organisational structure. Nasser wants to build for the successful implementation of his ideas. However, we have still not talked about the constitutional frame-work of his democracy. Let us have a quick look at it.

### *Democracy—For the people.*

In this regard Nasser is trying to devise a pragmatic combination of the Parliamentary as well as the socialist systems of Government. According to the National Charter, for instance, National Assembly formed through free direct elections, is to be the supreme legislative power in the UAR. It has to ensure that "Laws will not only be for the people, but of the people.". The National Assembly would not only discuss Legislative measures but would also keep an eye upon the working of the Government. In the words of the Cairo correspondent of the *Economist*, London, March 14, 1964, "The New National Assembly will be the apex of Egypt's many-tiered political pyramid, the whole of which is to be the Arab Socialist Union."

A peculiar feature of the elections to the Assembly was the fact that even though only one party, that is the Arab Socialist Union, had the right to put up candidates and all candidates had to obtain a sort of clearance certificate from the Arab Socialist Union, yet there was a genuine choice for the voter in each constituency. For example, in the National Assembly elections, completed on March 10, 1963, seven million persons

voted to choose three hundred members through secret ballot among the 850 candidates competing in the field. This looks like a happy compromise between the conventional type of Parliamentary democracy and the system of one-party rule.

Another innovation was that candidates were chosen both horizontically as well as vertically. Constituencies were cast out not only on geographical basis but also on professional lines so that, in compliance with the Charter, the National Assembly could provide at least fifty per cent of seats to workers and peasants. Adequate representation was also provided to such groups as the intelligentsia, the medical profession, journalists, and soldiers, Thus an attempt was made to remain true to Nasser's famous dictum that "ours is a revolution not for this, that or the other creed, but for the people."

Nasser himself has been emphatic in urging upon the members of the National Assembly that they should discharge their duties in an absolute spirit of freedom and honesty to their conscience. While presenting the Charter, he was bold enough to say that "the UAR should have collective leadership which prevents any one person to take all the authority in his hand". This could be done, he thought, if organisations like the National Assembly become really active and dynamic. At another time addressing the members of the National Assembly after taking the oath of the President in the beginning of March, 1965, the most important demand he made from the members was that they should tell the truth under all circumstances. "We are working for our country", he said, "when we come to discuss the affairs of this country every one must express his opinion fully and frankly. He may disagree with me and say no—if he did not, he would be neglecting the rights of those people who have entrusted us with leadership."

The National Assembly has by and large indeed been trying to live upto those standards. Last year, for example, there were heated debates in the Assembly, over a detailed examination of Government policies and achievements, punctuated by strong criticism of the working of some of the Ministries especially departments like Education, Social Welfare, and industrial production.

It is however, obvious that discussions are limited to what is called positive criticism and it is taken for granted that every member, regardless of the area and the profession he represents, is a firm believer in the basic tenets of the Charter.

*People's President.*

It is also the prerogative of the National Assembly to make nominations for the Presidentship. A proposal for the Presidential nomination must be backed by at least one-third of the members of the National Assembly. The nomination must be confirmed by a two-thirds majority of the National Assembly. Failing a two-thirds majority a secret ballot is held two days later and the person securing an absolute majority becomes the nominee. This nomination is then referred to the people for their approval. On approval by a majority, the President assumes office for a period of six years.

It goes to the credit of Nasser's democratic conscience that unlike two other important leaders of Asia and Africa, he categorically declined to accept Presidentship for life.

According to the Constitution, the President is both the Executive Head as also the final authority for approving legislation, though under certain circumstances the National Assembly can overrule his veto. For the effective discharge of his duties he appoints a Cabinet with the Prime Minister as its head which works under his direction and pleasure. Nevertheless, it is obligatory upon Ministers to explain their work and be answerable to the National Assembly for the policies of the Government. This is again a happy compromise between a Presidential system and a parliamentary one.

Since the structural aspect of democratic socialism as being experimented in the UAR is rather new and definite conventions and traditions of working of institutions like the Cabinet, the Presidency, the National Assembly and the Arab Socialist Union are yet to evolve, it would be premature to enter into a discussion about their co-relationship. Nevertheless, the structure of democracy which Nasser has given to his people, has the great potential of becoming a real democracy of the working people.

It is, for instance, proposed to have Popular Councils on the lines of the National Assembly in every Governorate. On a still lower level, popular councils in every city and village are also envisaged. These councils will look after not only all the immediate needs of their respective regions, but would also provide a structure of living democracy for the people to participate.

Thus, as Nasser has said : "it is proposed that democracy and socialism should become one extension of revolutionary action. Democracy means political freedom and socialism means social freedom."

(*Revolution Day Speech, 1955*)

II

# Ever Expanding Frontiers

A successful revolution must always expand its frontiers. Nasser has learnt this through a thorough study of revolutions of the past. The expansion of frontiers of revolution does not mean territorial expansion but advance in social and economic spheres. Through this awareness of the revolutionary responsibility Nasser was able to transform Egypt from a backward agricultural country to the most advanced industrial State in the whole of West Asia and Africa. The only industry which Egypt could boost of in the pre-revolutionary days barring, of course, gossip and scandal, was a rudimentary form of textile industry. Today she has become fully self-sufficient in oil, cement and light engineering goods. It is now proud of a medium size steel plant which is being expanded with Russian collaboration and its automobiles have started plying the roads of several African and Arab countries.

She has also started producing things like refrigerators, television sets, radios and transistors not to speak of aeroplanes including jets, armoured cars, machine guns including arms and ammunition and submarines. Only a couple of years ago, a crowd of proud Egyptians had greeted the firing of the first rocket made in UAR, the ALKAHIR. Its range is seven times that of the solid fuel rocket launched by Israel a year earlier.

The frantic activity going all around the industrial areas of Egypt where nearly 900 new factories have been built in the last ten years, gives one the idea of a nation in hurry. One gets the impression that these people who like us, have already missed the benefits of the age of steam and electricity, are running fast to catch up with the ever-changing industrial techniques

in the atomic age. The changing pattern of Egyptian economy meets you everywhere, whether you go to a restaurant, to a cinema or to an industrial plant. Wherever one may go, one will find the spirit of the Egyptian 'swedeshi'. In the restaurants from the linen, cutlery, crockery to such items as the air-conditioning plant and refrigerators, all are Egyptian. In the cinemas, almost all the cinematic equipment like projector, the film and the sound machine proudly bears, the "Made in Egypt" stamp. How the industrial horizon of Egypt has expanded becomes evident in a half-an-hour's drive from Cairo to a place called Helwan which was once known as a famous winter resort, with its dry weather and sulphur spring. Today anyone who drives from Cairo along the Nile would first come across the Cairo Power Station. This was the first industrial achievement of the Revolution. Then comes the river boat shipyard. In a country like Egypt where river navigation plays a vital role as a means of communications, the importance of the shipyard cannot be minimised. Then comes the proudest of all the achievements—the Iron and Steel plant. Nearby one finds the coke factory along with the forged iron works factory, then the silk yarn and weaving factory. Proudly the engineers working on the plants tell us, "We are also building a new plant for rolling iron and steel with a capital of about 45 million." In addition, the Helwan area today boasts of a cement plant as also of factories for lorries, cars and tractors. Somewhat farther away, there is a huge plant for manufacturing railway wagons as also for producing pipes, cables and aeroplanes.

We might take the liberty of digging into some relevant statistics to appreciate what has been done in the field of industry. In 1952, for instance, the total funds invested in industry amounted to a mere LE 21 million. This was about eight per cent of the total national income. Today the funds invested in the industry, according to the same price index, stand at LE 165 million, giving industrial investment a share of more than 33 per cent of the national income. In terms of workers, the figure has risen from 4.5 million industrial workers in 1951-52 to about 8.5 million. More impressive still is the fact that whereas the total exports of industrial products in 1952 did not amount to more

than LE 13.5 million, it has crossed the mark of LE 100 million by this year.

Similarly, the national income has been doubled between 1952 and 1959. The aim of the present plan is to double it again by 1971. Nasser has always been emphatic in saying that however important and satisfactory the progress might have been, it is neither sufficient nor can it provide place for complacency. He has been continuously arguing that the doubling of the national income within a period of five to seven years may be all right. But if the same is stretched, say to a period of about 20 years, the effect of it will be completely lost due to the rise in population as well as in demand. How the demand upon the resources is rising is evident from the fact that the national budget alone has risen from LE 200 million to over LE 1,100 million at the beginning of this year.

According to an economic survey conducted by the UAR Ministry of Planning, with the help of UNESCO, the individual income has risen by 19.1 per cent and the family income by 21 per cent within a period of the five plan years (1960-65).

Let us have a look at another set of statistics. This concerns the average rate of economic growth per annum during the period 1960-65 of the important under-developed countries of the world. According to the United Nations Statistical book, 1965-66, the average rate of growth during 1960-65 has been as as follows :

Argentine 2 per cent, Brazil 5.1 per cent, Chile 3.7 per cent, Burma 4.2 per cent, Ceylon 3.1 per cent, India 2.3 per cent, Nigeria 4.6 per cent, Uganda 2.6 per cent and Morocco 3 per cent. Compared with all these, the UAR rate was 7.4 per cent, the highest in the world.

The significance of this becomes still more startling when one realises that Nasser has done all this in spite of the fact that he had no windfall like oil or copper. While the UNESCO experts have estimated a 40 per cent rise in people's real incomes, the price rise by the same estimate has not been of more than eight per cent. This means that an average Egyptian is today earning more than one-third of what he was earning before 1960. The population of Egypt was about 21 million at the time of the

Revolution and is likely to be over 30 million at the moment. This means that during these years, there has been almost a forty per cent rise in the population. On top of it, Egypt had to meet the economic cost of the Suez War. The question has often been asked how was Nasser was able to do it? During the plan period alone Egypt has been able to spend LE 2,000 million. From where did Nasser get all this? In a speech on Revolution Day, 1965, he tried to answer this question, by himself asking the people "I didn't have all this huge amount of money to spend on development of the country. Who provided it? *You did.* The people made sacrifices in order to build industries and to develop their country and give it a sound economic base."

To make the people sacrifice for a happier future, Nasser had to do many things. The first thing he did was to link the struggle for the economic reconstruction with the fight Egypt was putting up against colonialism and imperialism.

## *Pragmatic Idealism*

The struggle for the defence of Suez and the construction of the High Dam was as much a fight for the defence of national honour, as it was for the economic emancipation of the Egyptian people. How much interlinked the struggle of political and economic emancipation has been, is evident from the example of nationalisation of the Suez Canal. Whereas in the pre-nationalisation period, Egypt used to get only one million LE as her share of the Canal dues, she is today receiving about one hundred million LE from the same source. With a modest enhancement of canal fees by three per cent, the total income Egypt has received since the nationalisation is around 800 million pounds by the end of 1966. This is in spite of the fact that following nationalisation, the UAR spent over seventy million pounds for improvement of the Canal—a sum three times bigger than the total amount spent by the Anglo-French Company during the last eighty years. But it was not the Canal alone which Nasser handled as an integral part of the people's twin fight for national liberation and economic emancipation. All foreign establishments were nationalised in 1956-57. This gave a big boost not only to the national economy by providing

all the funds which used to be channelled abroad in form of profits, but also fired the people's imagination as an act of national liberation. These laws were followed by the nationalisation decree of July, 1961 and the socialist laws of August, 1963.

The example of banking alone is enough to indicate the gigantic contribution nationalisation has made to the country's development. Prior to the Revolution, there were 35 scheduled banks operating in Egypt. Of these, nine were of foreign origin which, between themselves, controlled about 45 per cent of the total banking business of the country. Other banks, nominally Egyptian, were indirectly dominated by foreign interests. The banks provided credit only against the standing cotton crop in which the foreign imperial interests were vitally involved and for the import of foreign goods into Egypt. They had thus become instruments of the economic imperialist policy of keeping the underdeveloped countries always dependent upon imports and retaining them as mere suppliers of raw material. The Revolution introduced a new banking policy which had immediate result. In 1958, the major banks excluding commercial banks gave loans to the tune of £ 236.9 million for industrial development. After nationalisation, the figure rose, by the end of 1961, to £ 384.9 million. By the end of 1962 it shot up to £ 474.3 million, thus registering an increase of £ 237.5 million. This was a little more than double the amount which the major banks had loaned to the national economy in 1958.

Coupled with the money released through people's control over banking, Nasser gave serious thought to a progressive system of taxation through which a virtual ceiling has been put upon the rural and urban incomes. This has also helped in mobilising the funds hitherto rotting as black money for the purpose of national reconstruction. Through a proper balancing of the system of indirect taxation whereby luxury goods are heavily taxed as compared to items like wheat, cooking oil, maize, and flour which are subsidised by the State, not only an egalitarian pattern of economy has been achieved, but also monetary resources have become available for developmenal expenditure.

It is a tribute to the internal strength Nasser has built that major industrial nations of the world including the USA, Japan, Italy, the UK, France and West Germany have come forward to collaborate with the UAR in many an important industrial project. Even such agencies like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank as also American Credit Agency have found it profitable to provide a helping hand at least with some of the projects. Besides the USSR, other socialist countries like East Germany, Poland, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Hungary have made a welcome contribution in the national reconstruction.

Thus by standing upon her own feet and taking to a road of radical economy, Nasser has shown that to secure foreign collaboration it is not necessary to forego national interest and policies. On the contrary, the stronger you are in the matter of economic independence, the greater will be the availability of foreign collaboration—on your own terms.

The Nasserian experiment in economic planning has also given a lie to the general impression that nationalised industry is not as efficient as the private one. By shrewdly providing a 25 per cent share of profits to the workers from industries in which they work, and by associating them as Directors in the management of the companies, Nasser has been able to receive the maximum cooperation from those who work and manage the nationalised ventures. Consequently, the value of production has risen from LE 399 million in 1961 when the nationalisation movement began to about LE 700 million in 1965. Total profits in 1961 of the industrial concerns which were nationalised stood at LE 27 million. By 1965, they had risen to about LE 50 million.

Nasser, as a realist, knows that, "a worker who is told that he lives under socialism cannot eat socialised steel or cement. Socialism to be a reality and an inspiration must reflect itself in the day-to-day life of the people". This dictum of realism has found expression in the huge programme of social services the UAR has embarked upon in the last ten years.

Take, for instance, education. It has been made completely free in all stages right up to the University and compulsory at

the primary level. Whereas only about 30 per cent of the children of school-going age were attending schools in 1952, the percentage has gone up to over 85 per cent at the present moment. It is hoped that by 1970 illiteracy will be almost completely wiped out.

Though education at all levels, including engineering, medicine and sciences, is completely free, admissions to all institutions is governed by the attainment of marks in the qualifying examination. Those who fail to qualify for admission are offered opportunities of training in polytechnics and employment suitable to their aptitude.

To complement free education, a scheme for insurance against employment has been initiated. Accordingly, no University graduate can remain unemployed for more than six months. As Nasser has said, the importance of providing full employment is so great that there are many factories where modern machinery has been rejected simply because it would put some workers out of the job. From the last two years a comprehensive pension scheme has also been established covering more than 1.7 million heads of families with about 8.5 million dependants.

Along with it the national health scheme has been promulgated. Consequently the price of medicine has already been lowered by 25 to 40 per cent and direct medical aid has been provided to about 40 per cent of the population. By 1970, full medical facilities are likely to be provided to the total population.

For the last four years Egypt has been implementing a building scheme. As has been remarked by a constantly globe trotting journalist, Cairo is perhaps the only capital in the world where the rents have actually gone down rather than going up.

A UN survey had pointed out Cairo is the most inexpensive capital in the world. Prices have been kept under control because of a firm check on profiteering, regularisation of wholesale and retail rate and subsidies to all the essential commodities for the people.

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# A Bond Eternal

In the foreign policy of the U.A.R., India occupies as important a place as does the U.A.R. for us. Both being pillars of non-alignment in Asia and Africa, it was expected of them to be the closest of friends. It is for instance not a mere coincidence that while the concept of non-alignment in its present form was propounded the first time in New Delhi, the call for the first non-aligned conference came from Cairo.

The concept of non-alignment as applied to the solution of the concrete problems of world politics has been as much strengthened through Nasser's championship of it during the recent years as it was in the pre-and-post-Bandung years by the efforts of Late Jawaharlal Nehru.

The close affinity between the Indian and the Nasserian points of view over matters of world politics is evident from the six principles of U.A.R. foreign policy Nasser underlined while inaugurating the first session of the newly elected National Assembly in Cairo. These principles are : 1. Unshakable belief in peace based upon justice. 2. Relentless struggle to liquidate imperialism in both its new and old forms, military bases and economic monopoly. 3. Peaceful co-existence linked up with steps such as disarmament and peaceful co-operation. 4. Efforts to make foreign trade more balanced so that a minority composed of developed countries cannot exploit the vast majority composed of under-developed nations. 5. Abolition of racial discrimination. 6. An invincible attachment to non-alignment. "Non-alignment is a means of preserving freedom in conformity with principles, and a refusal to sign blank cheques as a sign of sub-servience. No matter how the practice of non-aligned policy may change ; due to changes in

international status, it will always remain fundamentally unchanged."

The "alliance for freedom", as the common adherence of India and the U.A.R. to the cause of non-alignment has been called, is based fundamentally on the fact that the two countries believe in progressive secular ideas.

As a concrete expression of the Indo-U.A.R. friendship, the U.A.R. today has become India's biggest trading partner in Africa, accounting for about 28 per cent of our total export to Africa and about 20 per cent of our imports from that continent. The total flow of trade both ways has been over Rs. 50 crores last year and is expected to reach the 100 crores' mark in the next three years. A welcome trend in this economic partnership is the fact that items of trade include things like sophisticated machinery and light engineering goods covering a vast range of items. Apart from trade, agreements have been concluded for joint ventures in industry and scientific research as also for the creation of machinery for consultations over matters of mutual economic interests.

As regards the political side, the contribution both the countries are making with their common adherence to the ideals of secular nationalism has already been discussed. It is also a matter of pride for both of us that the India of Jawaharlal Nehru and the Egypt of Gamal Abdel Nasser have always stood together in hours of crisis.

Nasser himself has been most emphatic in declaring that during the Suez crisis, the support he got from India was most valuable. Similarly, India is indebted to the fraternal gesture of Nasser, when he closed the Suez Canal to the Portuguese ships during the Goa operation.

When China committed aggression against India, the Presidential Council of the U.A.R. released a resolution amounting to a condemnation of the Chinese invasion. The resolution suggested that the Chinese forces should go back to the pre-invasion line all along the boundary so that negotiations could begin between the two sides. Nehru paid a warm tribute to Nasser while opening the Lok Sabha debate on the Chinese

invasion. In a letter to Mr. Chou En-lai, he drew Peking's attention to the U.A.R. proposals.

It was Nasser who first moved in the matter of calling a conference of nonaligned countries to support India and to bring the dispute to an end.

It is a matter of common knowledge that in the Colombo Conference it was the U.A.R. in whom India found the most steadfast supporter of our stand that no territorial gains made through aggression could be recognised. Ever since, Nasser has not flinched from his firm support to the Colombo proposals on the border dispute. This support has played a vital role in strengthening our case *vis-a-vis* the Chinese aggressiveness and has been of great help to India in making her case intelligible to the Afro-Asian people.

On matters like the Chinese role in the Afro-Asian world, specially in the newly liberated countries of Africa, Nasser has made it clear that although he is desirous of friendship with China, he is absolutely against the Chinese big brother tactics of intervention into the internal affairs of other countries. His regime has not hesitated in severely punishing some of the Left sectarians who were conspiring to establish a "Peoples' Republic of Egypt" and had identified themselves with China in the international Communist movement.

As regards Indo-Pakistan troubles, Nasser has consistently supported India's contention that the issue could best be solved among the two neighbours themselves. It was due to the tremendous influence exerted by the U.A.R. delegation during the Arab summit conference held at Casablaca soon after the Indo-Pakistan conflict that Pakistan's efforts to get India condemned could not yield results. Rejecting the pleas of those who want to intervene in the Indo-Pakistan dispute in the name of religion, Nasser has consistently taken the stand that no foreign intervention is called for in the settlement of the dispute.

While closing a survey of Indo-U.A.R. relations, one cannot do better than to quote our philosopher statesman, Dr. Radhakrishnan, who, speaking at a banquet given in honour of President Nasser during his visit to India in 1960, said :

"Though Egypt suffered from external pressures, her spirit was unbroken and she had her freedom struggle along with ours and the names of Makram, Arabi and Zaghloul are well known. She has now emerged independent. It is one thing to break down the old regime, it is another to build the new. Political independence is only the clearing of the decks.

"As in other countries of the East, we have on the one side monuments, tombs and ruins and on the other poverty, filth, disease and destitution. The leaders of the Revolution in Egypt are addressing themselves to the task of lifting these oppressive burdens from the shoulders of the people. They are engaged in a social and human revolution by which equitable distribution of land, industrial progress, religious freedom and democratic liberties are established. We are also engaged in the same exciting adventure and, so, Egypt has our sympathy and support as the recent treaty of friendship between India and Egypt illustrates."

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# A Secular Messiah

CAIRO, April 21.—According to an Associated Press report President Nasser has expressed pride that his own daughter failed to get into the Cairo University because she had not obtained the required marks for joining the University. "I am proud of that", he told a public meeting, "while the son of a farmer managed to join the University, since he had obtained a few marks more than her, the daughter of the President could not, who followed him in order of merit."

The small news-item spoke a great deal about the equality of opportunity which has now become the cornerstone of U.A.R. socialism. It also provided a mirror to the fair-mindedness of the man who has become the most powerful personality in the Middle East today. Only a decade ago, Nasser had created a sensation by refusing to occupy the King's palace as his residence.

By continuing to live in the bungalow he occupied as an Army officer he had shown that a new type of leadership had appeared at the helm of Egypt—a leadership which considers luxury and pompousness unpardonable vices rather than enviable virtues. It is as much through his attachment to a rigorous code of personal and public ethics as it is by his clarity of mind and organisational skill, that Nasser today has become not merely the President of his own country, but also a symbol of Arab aspirations and Arab nationalism.

How strong this symbol is became apparent to me while in Aden. On learning that I and my wife, we were at that time on a lecture tour of Arab countries, were on our way to

Cairo and were likely to meet Nasser, a group of school girls we had just addressed, literally besieged us with personal messages for 'the President'. It was touching to hear these innocent children plead : "when he shakes hands with you, please press it a little harder on our behalf." There was also a portrait of his in black and red. The red was the blood of the three girls who had jointly drawn it. It was given to us for getting it autographed by 'Gamal whenever you meet him' (He signed it smiling during our interview, and it was promptly posted back to the children). We learn that it still hangs on the wall of the drawing room of one of the girls, who has since got married, has a couple of children and tells them proudly how it was obtained.

While talking about Nasser many an unforgettable incident come back to my mind. In a street in Cairo a hawker of antiques got round us and started pestering us. An Arabic-speaking friend accompanying us knew that we had no use for such things. He tried to persuade him to leave us alone. But the man would not. In the end our friend said : "Look, they are our guests and are from India, the land from which comes Nehru, Nasser's best friend. What will Gamal say when he hears that you are doing this to them". The poor hawker did not say a word afterwards, apologized profusely, and left.

A third scene. While travelling in a public bus in Beirut we got into conversation with a group of students from the Famous American university of Beirut. On hearing that we had interviewed Nasser only a couple of days ago in Cairo, each one of them comes forward, shakes hands with us saying that by doing so he was shaking hands with his destiny and insists upon making us special guests at a students' party in the University that very afternoon.

A fourth scene. Thousands of people are lining up in the famous Al-Tehrir, the liberation square of Cairo, right from the mid-day to have a glimpse of the man whom they call their deliverer, scheduled to speak at about 6 in the evening. I ask one of the shopkeepers whom I recognised, what was the fun of closing his shop and coming to see a man who lives amidst them, and whom one sees every day ? The man feels obviously

annoyed, and but for the tremendous respect the mention of India evokes in an Arab heart he would have been rather rude and stern. In my case he is humble and civil and answers by saying, "Then you do not know Gamal. Every time he speaks, there is something very familiar, which we seem to know for centuries, but also something new which we have never known before."

Such is the magic of Gamal Abdel Nasser. Here was the man who has been more successful as a revolutionary leader than any of his contemporaries in the world, and yet he was humble to the extent that even the poorest of the fellah toiling in the farthest part of rural Egypt could recognise him as one of his kith and kin. This was the man who till the merger of Syria had not been to any Arab land except the Holy Mecca and some parts of Palestine. In spite of that he was considered the most important leader in any part of the Arab world. This is the man who at the comparatively young age of forty had come to be considered as an "elder statesman", had got himself transformed from the so-called military dictator to a popular President, who instead of beheading his opponents, as was the case with most of the other revolutionary leaders, was actually emptying his prison cells.

What is the source of his popularity? A meeting with him does not fully explain the query. Yet being face to face with the man who in the words of Jawaharlal Nehru "has given a new turn to history", does explain a few sources of his strength.

I met him for the first time at Bandung. He was as much a newcomer to international politics as I was to the profession of journalism. Introducing me, venerable nationalist leader of ours, Dr. Syed Mahmud, then Minister of State for External Affairs, had jokindly said, "here is the youngest correspondent covering the conference". This brought an instant smile on the face of Nasser who was then only 37. He replied, "Good, I like meeting young people whose minds are fresh and agile". On my answering back that the compliment should apply to the other side since "Your Excellency represents the youth and vitality of Asia and Africa, being the youngest and the most dynamic of her leaders", he responded with a shy smile which was as charming as it was endearing.

In the huge party thrown by the five sponsoring leaders of the Conference, Soekarno, Nehru, U Nu, Kotelawala and Mohammad Ali Bogra, meeting any statesman of world stature and talking to him on any matter of substance seemed impossible. A chance to meet Nasser was indeed rare good luck. But I did not expect him to be either so courteous or frank. On my request for his frank ideas about the conference, he replied, "For this the best person to talk to would be your Prime Minister, who is our guide in such matters." Nevertheless he invited me the next day for a chat in the hotel lawns, in spite of the fact that being the holy month of Ramadan, he was fasting during the day and was already under a hectic schedule.

The way this 'six-footer in khaki' talked the next day gave me the impression that I knew him for years. By the time I met him the Western journalists had already tried to make much about "the pharohnic lines of his face'. These were there, no doubt. But the feature which impressed me the most was the glimmer in his eyes. The way he talked about "our twin struggle to destroy the old and build a new Egypt', showed that this secular leader of the Arab World was as conscious of the reality of today, as he was of the nightmares of yesterday, and the dreams of tomorrow.

Instantly one could feel the force of his personality about which a distinguished British soldier had said that its attraction is so great that one feels it to fill the room as a physical force. "It is extraordinarily difficult to disagree with him on what he says." Yet the man was saying nothing extraordinary and had no visible hypnotic aura around him. The things he was telling me were ordinary commonplace matters relating to problems like the low yield from agriculture, the inevitability of the unity of the Arab world, and the wonderful results which could follow from cooperation among Afro-Asian countries. His hypnotic power seemed to consist in his sincerity and a deep and natural sense of humour.

The next time I along with my wife saw him at Cairo in the spring of 1958. More than eight years have passed since then, but the meeting seems as fresh in our minds as if it took place only yesterday. As usual, he had invited us to his

residence, which had a simple and frugal look, at the end of the 'day's work'. The appointment was at 11 P.M.

The chamber to which we were conducted after passing a corridor looking like one of the barracks of the old days, a group of security guards, a small garden and a modest verandah, was a place no bigger than an ordinary middle class drawing room. In front of us was a set of pictures of his close friends including Jawahar Lal Nehru and Dr. Rajendra Prasad.

On being greeted, my wife jokingly said that it was an odd hour to finish a day's work. Looking downwards, Nasser replied, that she wasn't quite correct. His work for the day had not yet finished. He would go back to his desk after his meeting with us. Then suddenly realising that it might not be taken as a polite hint to us to be brief, he added, "there could not be a better break for mental recoupment than talking to friends like you for a good length of time." By that time, rounds of black coffee had started coming in. While the discussion progressed, the cups one after another got empty, and the ash tray in front of him, became fuller and fuller.

As is well known, his only 'vice' is his constant smoking, about which, while apologizing to my wife, he said, somehow he had to depend upon it in spite of the fact that it did not agree with his throat.

On my reminding him about our meeting at Bandung three years ago, he recalled the occasion with touching tenderness, adding, "These three years have been to me like 30 years to another man." This was of course true. Compared to the youthful black curly hair of Bandung days, his temples had already started having a thick streak of grey. But his metallic, brassy full voice did not give the impression of either being tired or of getting old. Being face to face one instantly realised the truth of the statement Adlai Stevenson had made about him. "Nasser is the strongest personality of his generation ; only the small countries have the luck to find such remarkable rulers."

The remarkable thing about Nasser was that in spite of the success he had, he remained very humble about his own role,

and disarmingly frank about conditions in the country. About himself he said, that on assumption of power he had neither known much about economic theories nor about political manoeuvring. "In fact", he said, "people took us as no better than an ordinary group of army officers who had assumed power through a military conspiracy on the pattern of Latin American revolutions. It was only through a process of error and trial that we were able to evolve a line of action." On being complimented for the achievement of the Egyptian revolution in uplifting the standard of living of the people, he remarked : "This might be so, but there is still a great deal of poverty which you have perhaps not seen. It was easier to destroy a system of exploitation. But our real challenge lies in our efforts to build a new system based upon equality and prosperity." The only achievement he claimed was what he had earlier told a British journalist, that he hoped, but he was not sure, that through the Revolution and facing the aggression, he was able to give a new sense of dignity to his people.

## *Man in the House*

In a country where the private life of the ruler was associated with the most despicable of personal behaviour, Nasser has invested both dignity and decency to the public image of the men who rule. He himself is prone to say that his private life is a private affair, concerning nobody and need not be brought in the limelight. 'In any case', he told a foreign journalist, 'it is so ordinary that nobody will have an interest in it.'

That journalist has himself admitted that it was indeed so. Being a devoted and faithful husband, a loving father of five children, a budget-conscious provider for the family and a teetotler, his private life is obviously "uninteresting." It is as plain and simple, as any middle class, middle-aged woman would expect from a model husband.

His favourite recreation is playing childish pranks with his three sons and two daughters. Both the daughters have of course been married. His favourite drink is tea, and his favourite game is chess, which he is fond of playing with his life-long friend Abdel Hakim Amer, after whom is named

Nasser's youngest son. He is known to be a devout Muslim, fasting during the month of the Ramadan and saying prayers everyday in the morning. He is also fond of swimming, hunting, tennis and photography for which he rarely finds time. The only habit of his, which could be called somewhat away from the ordinary life of a middle class citizen, is his love for reading. In spite of the heavy work schedule running into more than eighteen hours a day, he finds time to go through important English and Arabic newspapers from all over the world. Like so many army officers of his generation, he too likes seeing movies.

Perhaps the only sign of affluence in the house is a movie projector on which the latest films are screened, whenever the President is free or whenever his family is able to cajole him into escaping from official files.

His children go to schools which are neither very posh nor expensive. He has refused to have any security or an escort for them. Being a devoted housewife intensely interested in the well being of her family and in the maintenance of the household, Madame Nasser is rarely seen out of doors. This is in spite of the fact that Madame Tahia Nasser (Nee Kazem) comes of a good middle class family and has been well-educated at the posh French School meant for young ladies of the upper classes. She has also shared Nasser's days of hardship, about which we have talked earlier.

Nasser does not like the idea of his wife taking an active part in public life, not because he is against women's participation in public affairs—no man in Egypt has done more than what he has, for the emancipation of women—but because in the older days wives of political leaders were so much in the limelight, that every important activity of the state and invariably all the scandals used to revolve round their personalities.

However interesting and inspiring this simplicity of life might seem for the people in the Afro-Asian part of the world, it is not the Westerners' cup of tea. "The real trouble with Nasser", an American intelligence officer is reported to have exasperatingly acclaimed to an American author, "is that he has no vices. That makes him practically invulnerable. He

cannot be bought, bribed or even black-mailed. We hate his guts, but we can't do a thing about the guy. He's just too damn nice". (Joachim Joesten—Nasser—The Rise to Power, P. 221).

## *Dater with Destiny*

The real significance of Nasser's achievement can only be grasped in perspective of Arab revolutions of the past and the present. Many before him like Rashid Ali Gailani had fought the battle for nationalism. A number of revolutions in other countries have also followed the Egyptian Revolution of 1952. Yet most of them have either fondered at the rock of internal conspiracies in the ruling junta, or have been crushed through outside interference. Some have continued, but the results have been far from inspiring. Practically every country in West Asia has been rocked by revolutions and upheavals falling in quick successions durng the last decade and a half. The only exception has been Nasser's Egypt. Here the revolution has not only been stabilized but has been constantly expanding its social and economic frontiers. It is Nasser's achievement that a country which was treated as a laughing stock by politicians of the world a few years ago, is today considered among the most important States of the world. Egypt's experiment with socialism, its leadership of the Arab world, and its firm adherence to non-alignment, have made a deep impact far beyond the territory of the country Nasser heads.

What, after all, has been the source of his success ? Some have attributed it to his skill as a successful organiser of the Revolution, others have given credit to the strong backing he enjoys in the army and still others are of the opinion that it was due to conditions of utter despair, decadence and economic bankruptcy prevailing in the pre-revolutionary Egypt.

A deeper analysis would, however, reveal that all these reasons are either imaginary or at the most superficial. For one thing Nasser, in spite of his political far-sight and tactical shrewdness, is not the man who could outbeat some of his contemporaries in the Arab world—Kassem, for example, in the game of political conspiracies. Again, if army was considered the only

factor responsible for his success, then, revolutions in Turkey, Ghana and Nigeria, not to speak of countries like Thailand and South Vietnam should have proved thundering successes.

As regards the argument that he replaced an utterly despicable system with at least a tolerable one, it could be said this was also true of many of the neighbouring Arab countries. But while revolutionary attempts in these countries failed, it succeeded in Egypt. The success of Nasser was essentially due to the fact that, as Nehru had said : "This young man has always been ready to learn". Right from the beginning he was able to associate the whole people with his movement, and has thus never depended upon a small junta of army officers for the maintenance of his rule. In fact, within a few years of the revolution, he was able to send the army back to the barracks.

It speaks highly of his secular mindedness as also of his tractical far-sight, that he could achieve complete immunity for political action from pressures emanating from religious groups, like the Ulema and the Muslim Brotherhood. Still more important is Nasser's achievement in keeping his regime absolutely humane. It is a refutation of the impression that it is imperative for a revolutionary leader desiring continuity in office to be ruthless and cruel towards his adversaries, especially his comrades in arms. He has been extraordinarily mild towards his adversaries representing the old order. He himself is on record saying that in spite of the sympathy he had for the Turkish revolution, he intensely disliked the brutality of Ataturk's behaviour towards his friends and colleagues. "What good is a revolution if it does not make the individual free? If it is just by force?" (Desmond Stewart, Young Egypt, p. 184).

No wonder a unique aspect of Nasser's revolutionary philosophy has been his preference for 'white' methods as compared to the bloody ones. To many of his colleagues his insistence on peaceful ways looked like a personal weakness born of sentimentality. But through the success of the revolution he has shown that this is the best policy to follow.

His road to socialism in spite of the 'expropriation of the expropriators', has been remarkably smooth and peaceful one.

Except a few confirmed conspirators none has either been beheaded or treated severely.

It is for a future historian, who may be a little further away from the gaze of contemporary events, to analyse the reasons of the fall of men like Soekarno and Nkrumah, U Nu and many other revolutionary leaders, while the tide of Nasser's glory has risen unabetted.

One explanation for this may be what John Gunther had given more than a decade ago. This almost to a word still holds good. Talking about Nasser's source of strength Gunther had said : "His chief source of power is that he really stands for something, the liberation and advancement of the masses. He has given his people what they have seldom had before—hope. No wonder Egyptians call his movement the 'blessed Revolution'."

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# So Said Gamal Abdel Nasser

## *Twin Ordeal*

"Every nation on earth undergoes two revolutions : One political, in which it receives its right for self-government from an imposed despot, or an aggressive army occupying its territory without its consent. The second revolution is social, in which the classes of society would struggle against each other until justice for all countrymen has been gained and conditions have become stable."

"Other nations have preceded us along the path of human progress and have passed through the two revolutions, but not simultaneously. Hundreds of years separated the one from the other. In the case of our nation, it is going through the two revolutions together and at the same time, a great experiment putting us to the test."

(*The Philosophy of the Revolution*)

## *The Opposites*

Socialism is sufficiency and justice, but reaction is exploitation and oppression.

(*Cairo, March 22, 1966*)

## *Sweat not Slogans*

"Socialism means that we build and engage workers and give them wages with which they may buy goods from the market; and as a result of this, we find ourselves in need of more goods. We build another factory and we pay them

wages, and they go and buy. We need bigger production. So we build a third factory; and thus we cultivate and expand the cultivaiton and reclaim lands and give people possession of them and so on. This is socialism as we understand it. It is not an art of magic; it does not mean that we get all that we wish, simply because we hoist the banner of socialism".

(*Address to National Assembly March 9, 1965*)

## *Negative and Positive*

"Socialism has both positive and negative values. The negative values are applied to the eradication of the sordid past, while the positive value enables us to proceed with the establishment of the future each one of us desires. Positively speaking, there is no end to the work that can be done, as positive work is a non-stop continuous process which goes on as long as life does."

(*Address while introducing the National Charter, March, 1962*)

## *Today and Yesterday*

"If we draw a comparison between the past, that is what had been going on before July 23, and what happened after July 23, we can realise the extent of the creativeness which enabled the Egyptian people to achieve revolutionary success. At the same time, we can also see how the Egyptian people were able to establish national unity and to destroy the partisanship and elements of dissension which imperialism had planted in our midst in the past, and which made it possible for imperialism to remain on our land for more than eighty years. This is what we have been able to accomplish in the political field.

Socially, we managed, in the course of the past thirteen years, to achieve a great deal for the farmers.

We have abolished feudalism, distributed the land among the farmers and established justice.

We reclaimed new cultivable areas, distributed them among the farmers and actually established sufficiency.

We ensured the rights of the farmer who was previously a slave to the land, a slave to the feudalist and a slave to the landowner."

(*Cairo, July 22, 1956*)

## *Mortal and Immortal*

"I have always been against dependence on one individual and against delusion that the popular struggle needs one person in particular, no matter how much his country may have honoured him. This feeling was prompted by the unshakable belief that the people alone are immortal and that they are able at all stages in their struggle to produce from their ranks some one to serve their wishes and realise their dreams".

(*Speech to the National Assembly on the acceptence of nomination for Presidency —January 20, 1965*)

## *Festivals of Freedom*

"Festivals of free and living peoples are renewed impulses for progress. We continue to work all the year and we celebrate the festival of victory, and we derive from this festival and from the memories of victory, new force for advancing towards our ends; we derive from our festivals inspirations for new work."

(*Speech on Victory Day, December 23, 1964*)

## *Genesis of Revolution*

"We were fighting in Palestine but our dreams were in Egypt. Our bullets were aimed at the enemy lurking in the trenches in front of us, but our hearts were hovering round our distant Mother country, which was then a prey to the wolves that revaged it.

In Palestine Liberal Officers cells were meeting in trenches and posts, studying and searching. And it was in Palestine that Gamal Salem and Zakaria Mohy-el-Din come to me after having penetrated the seige of Falouga; there we sat beseiged, neither knowing what to become of that seige, nor when would it end. We spoke of nothing but our country and how to liberate it. It was in Palestine that Kamal El Din Hussein sat beside me one day and spoke as his eyes wandered and his thoughts disappeared; Do you know what Ahmed Abdel Aziz had told me before he died ? he asked, "What did he say?" I asked in return. With a deep tone of voice and still deeper look he said, "Listen Kamal, Egypt is the field of our supreme war effort".

(*The Philosophy of the Revolution*)

## *Cause of Defeat*

"The Arab countries were defeated in Palestine because they were seven countries fighting against one country, namely Israel".

(*Cairo, March 5, 1965*)

## *Real Revolution*

"The difference between the revolution and the coup de tat is this; the revolution is a radical change in the system of the society; this change is initiated by a minority which represents the majority. Expressing the wishes of the people, this revolution expands in expression and in participation, so as to ensure through the path the required changes. Speaking of the Revolution, the National Character stated that the revolution by its very nature is a popular and progressive action, it is a movement of a whole people who mobilise their powers in order to determinedly assault all obstacles and impediments likely to obstract their life as they envisage and want it. The revolution is also a jump across the gap of economic and social backwardness, in an attempt to compensate for what we missed and in order to realise the great hopes which appear in the high ideal cherished by the coming generations. Thus the true revolution-

ary action cannot be accomplished without two basic characteristics, first its popularity, second its progressiveness."

(*Cairo, July 22, 1965*)

## *Demands of Destiny*

"This generation of Egyptians had a date with destiny. This generation was equal to the demands of the country and was crowned with victory and success after a long period of struggle. The future generations will feel proud of the present generation which is the revolutionary vanguard and has introduced radical and basic changes in the country. This revolutionary vanguard is not confined to those young men who answered an urgent appeal of the people on July 23, 1952. The revolutionary vanguard to my mind, includes all the people who have faith in the possibility of change, who have left aside the defeatist slogans of the past and have gone ahead to build a new society".

(*Cairo, July 22, 1962*)

## *Continnous Revolution*

"Socialism is sufficiency and justice. As far as justice is concerned, we have done a great deal. What remains is sufficiency".

(*Speech in Port Said, December 23, 1964*)

## *Plans—Big or Small*

"Some people ask : Why should we invest LE 3000 million? LE 15000 million would be enough as in previous years. But it is not possible to invest LE 1500 million only. If we do so, your children will not have jobs. Your children will stay at home when they graduate from the Universities. This will lead to unemployment".

(*Address to National Assembly, March 23, 1966*)

## *Resources for Reconstruction*

"As I have already told you, we have no money. You will have to finance the Plan. You will have to provide the LE 1500 million. You will have to provide the money needed for investments, be it LE 3000 million or LE 2800 million. By you I mean the people. Our capital is our work and our first Plan has proved that work is possible, and that it is the only road to progress."

*(Cairo, March 22, 1966)*

## *Save and Survive*

"If we saved on our consumption of wheat or of maize, or of anything, it would mean that we are saving funds. With these funds we can build factories and reclaim land in which we can employ our sons who are graduating from schools and Universities. Each one of them wants to find a chance to work. Why should one have a son, if when he becomes twenty years of age, he will not find work, or live a life of poverty.

We want our sons to live a happy life, a life of prosperity. To attain this, we must curtail consumption and save."

*(Suez, March 9, 1965)*

## *Differences with Communism*

"In plenty of places our socialist trends differ from Communism. These differences are radical. In the first place, we believe in religion. We utterly refuse any form of class dictatorship. We look forward to national unity. We do not liquidate social classes by force, we only dissolve class privileges".

*(Address to Parliamentary Commission of Arab Socialist Union—Arab Observer March 8, 1965)*

## *Light Eternal*

"Learning is the infallable vessel for protection and promoting our dreams, learning is the search-light which we throw over all our surrounding in order to speed forward with reason and enlightenment. With the search light of learning, we are between the economic and social forces, and redefining them on a more adequate basis in the interest of vast majority.

Learning is the ferry boat to a wholesome future, and social commitment is its unerring guide."

*(Address to the winners of Prizes, on Arts and Science Day—December 16, 1964)*

## *Beware of Bureaucracy*

"The bureaucratic spirit which still exists, will try by all means to gain an ascendency. During the transition from capitalism, bureaucracy will do everything to gain as much power it can, in order to play a decisive part in production and social relations, and to monopolise this role. With such monopoly bureaucracy can replace capitalism in society. Only the strict supervision of peoples' representatives and popular cooperation on all the levels of construction, can counter the bureaucratic urge to dominate our society".

*(November 12, 1964. Address to the National Assembly)*

## *Islamic Alliance*

"The Islamic Pact is an imperialist pact meant to fight liberation movements and oppose social progress. The Islamic Pact is an alliance for conspiring against Arab peoples and dragging them into Western zones of influence. It also conspires against other Islamic countries adopting the non-aligned policy".

*(Cairo, February 22, 1966)*

## *Faith in Secularism*

"We as Government, and I as President of the Republic, are responsible for every one in this country, regardless of his religion or his standing, and for this we are answerable to God on the Day of Judgement.

There are Moslem fanatics and there are Christian fanatics. A Moslem fanatic does not represent the Moslems and a Christian fanatic does not represent the Christians. They are only exceptions. We take pride and we render thanks to God in that we have no fanaticism and sectarianism in political life.

We yearn for perfection and we pray that the national unity which was formed with blood in 1919 and before, should be strengthened and consolidated."

(*Address on the opening of Institute of Coptic Studies—Arab Observer, August 2, 1965*).

## *An Imperialist Trap*

In a lengthy interview with this author, President Nasser had answered many questions regarding the relationship of religion with politics.

Question : Will you be willing to join a bigger Islamic bloc, composed of Arab and non-Arab nations ?

Nasser : I am very religious man, but you must have noted that the new constitution of the UAR omits emphasis on any religion. This is because we believe that we are Arabs first, and anything else afterwards. We are proud both of Mohamed and Christ, because they belonged to this area.

Yet, just as Arab-Christians cannot join a Christian bloc of Western nations, so Muslims cannot aspire to have an Islamic bloc. Though I as a Muslim find no reason why the broadest possible cooperation should not take place on matters concerning religion, it should never be allowed to enter the realm of politics.

The havoc which religious fanaticism can play is well known to you, and to us. We had the Moslem Brotherhood, which much to our dismay, became an organisation of imperialist stooges to bring back the monarchy and to tie Egypt to a particular bloc. By the grace of God and by the will of the people, we suppressed them. Something of the same nature had been happening in many other countries. Moreover, we have already had the taste of an Islamic Empire in the shape of the Ottoman rule.

As an Arab no one can dream of reviving it. Today, if a Muslim bloc is envisaged, it is bound to include countries like Turkey and Pakistan. We have some very bitter experience of their Pan-Islamic claims. Let us, for instance, compare the attitude of Mr. Nehru and Mr. Noon and Mr. Suhrawardy, respectively, towards and issue concerning the Arab people. The difference becomes apparent. Whereas India is pursuing an independent policy, Pakistan is tied down to the West. Similarly no Islamic bloc can be formed without issues like the Baghdad Pact coming on the top. So one can only laugh over the idea that an Islamic bloc should be formed under the leadership of Mr. Dulles.

Question : Suppose the Western influence be removed from the Bloc ?

Nasser : Even then, I do not think efforts to have an international bloc on the basis of religion will be a step in the right direction.

Religion as a basis of nationhood is today an anachronism, so are alliances among nations based on religious considerations. This fact is well borne out by the history of the world's progressive peoples in the past two centuries. Any return to this outmoded basis of national or international policy is inconceivable in the world's present temper".

*(Tribune, Ambala 27, April 1958 : Also quoted by R.K. Karanjia, Arab Dawn, Pages 191, 193).*

## *Puppets and Puppeteers*

"On the day of the nationalisation of the Canal on 28th July, King Feisl, Emir Abdullah and Nuri-El-Said were supping tea with Eden ; and as soon as the news reached Mr. Eden ; as related in the books, the cup fell from his hand, and King Feisal, Emir Abdullah and Nusi El Said picked up their courage and said to him : Here is the opportunity to do away with Abdel Nasser. They got up and everyone of them returned to his country with a feeling of strength. Where is Eden now ? Eden is gone, and the others too are gone ; Nuri-El-Said is gone ; King Feisal is gone ; and Emir Abdullah is gone."

(*March 22, 1966*)

## *I Prefer Egypt*

"To those who ask me whether I prefer the US or Russia, I say I prefer Egypt. Our actions should be solely prompted by our country's interest".

*Interview to Le Monde, Pais : Quoted by Keith Wheelock—Nasser's New Egypt, Page 227*

## *Peace and Non-alignment*

"Our movement for peace must remain free and strong: we must maintain it on the broadest possible fronts. Apart from continous communications among ourselves, we should always encourage and offer our whole hearted support for all collective and constructive endeavours aiming at the consolidation of peace by means of preserving freedom and enhancing progress. We should also remain in constant touch with the two conflicting military camps, since non-alignment does not mean that we isolate ourselves from problems ; it means that we should contribute positively to the consolidation of understanding and the opening of channels for the passage of ideas and thoughts across the deep chasms caused by crises".

(*Non-aligned conference, Belgrade September 1961*)

## *Four Faced Monster*

"Imperialism appears in different shapes. It is imperative that it should disappear in all its forms, old and new, implicit and explicit. Imperialism is a humiliation to our age. Under the title of imperialism we place first, arms suppression as we watch it in the Portuguese colonies, in the occupied Arab South, Aden and Oman. Second military pacts and bases. Third, land usurpation as in the case of Palestine. Fourth, racial discrimination as in South Africa."

(*Address to the Non-Aligned Conference, Cairo, October, 1964*)

## *Logic Behind Loans*

"The loans we borrow are not only of benefit to us but also to those who give them, because those who give us loans are also finding a market for their goods.

We borrow money in order to establish factories. These factories increase our national wealth. This is because the factory quicken the pace of production, and thereby we can easily pay back the loan with interest."

(*Address to the National Assembly. November 12, 1964*)

## *Take Your Tea Away*

The American Ambassador yesterday met the Deputy Prime Minister of Supply. He went to see him sulking and vaxed and stayed with him two minutes. They were supposed to speak about supply ; that is about the supply commodities which we get from America according to the surplus Commodities Law. But he said that he was unable to speak about such subjects for the time being, because they do not like our attitude here in Egypt. They are not pleased with this. I tell him that he who is not pleased, may drink from the sea. If the

Mediterranean was not enough, we will give him the Red Sea to drink from as well. I mean to say that we cannot sell our independence for LE 30, 40 or 50 million. We are not prepared to accept one word from any one. Whoever says one word to us, we would cut off his tongue. This is a clear and frank statement. We now drink tea for seven days. We can do with five days only, until we build up our country. We drink coffee for seven days, and can cut it down to four. We eat meat four days a week and can cut it down to three...We are dignified people, and we are not prepared to sell our dignity for a thousand million pounds, not to speak of 50, 30 or 40 million"

(*Speech on Victory Day ; Port Said December 23, 1964*)

## *Unplayed Role*

"The annals of history are full of heroes who carved for themselves great and heroic roles and played them on momentous occasions on the stage. History is also charged with great heroic roles which do not find actors to play them on the stage. I do not know why I always imagine that in the region in which we live, there is a role wandering aimlessly about seeking an actor to play it. I do not know why this role, tired of roaming about in this vast region which extends to every place around us, should at last settle down weary and worn out, on our frontiers beckoning us to move, to dress up for it and to perform it, since there is nobody else who can do so.

Here I hasten to point out that this role is not a leading role. It is one of interplay of reactions and experiments with all these, factors aiming at exploding this terrific energy latent in every sphere around us and at the creation, in this region, of a tremendous power capable of lifting this region up and making it happy. It is a positive role in the construction of the future of humanity".

(*The Philosophy of the Revolution*)

## *Arab Unity—All Pervasive Embrace*

"We have declared that we believe in one Arab nation. The Arab nation has always had one language. The unity of language is the unity of thought. The Arab nation has always had common history, and common history means unity of conscience..."

(*Address to the General Assembly of the United Nations, September 27, 1960*)

## *Enemies Within and Without*

"The enemies of Unity are not only imperialism and Israel, but also the reactionary powers allied with imperialism. All the anti-progressive powers are against unity. Why? Because unity always provided a social content for the eradication of exploitation, the elimination of the alliance of feudalism with capitalism, the establishment of sufficiency and justice, the setting up of a society where class differences are wiped out".

(*Speech on the Unity Day February. 22, 1965*)

Bhawan's Sri Sankaracharya Vidya Mandir
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## *Jawaharlal Nehru*

"He was the thinker, the politician and the great leader who made of his life—until the very last of his moment a torch-giving light to India, Asia and humanity".

(Condolence message to the President)

"The torch he has lit for India, and humanity will ever illuminate the road of freedom and progress".

(*Message to Mrs. Indira Gandhi*)

Ancient Egypt was the gift of the Nile, and modern U.A.R. is the miracle of Nasser. This book is a twin biography of the man, who in the words of Jawaharlal Nehru has changed the course of history in Arab world, as also of the miracle he has performed in the land of the Suez and the Sphinx. Apart from doing a great deal of research including many important sources in Arabic, the author has twice interviewed President Nasser.

Written in a lucidly fast moving style the book is as gripping an account of the life of the man who has been called the greatest Arab since Saladin, as spell binding it is, a narration of the great fall the imperialist Humpty Dumpty had in Suez. The author has also mirrored in depth and detail the new political philosophy, along with the social and economic institutions of U.A.R.

The author who also writes under his famous pen name of Zafar Pyami, is an eminent columnist, radio and television commentator and short-story writer. He has widely travelled in West and other parts of the world. Considered as one of the important creative writers in Urdu, "Zafar Pyami" is equally popular in India and Pakistan. Apart from his broadcast and widely read columns in some of the leading newspapers, his published works include, collections of short stories, impressionistic travelogues and eye witness accounts of many important events. His familiarity with Arabic and Persian languages as also a thorough knowledge of political and cultural trends in the Muslim world owes as much to a brilliant academic career—he did his M.A. (Political Science) with distinction from the Allahabad University—as to the background of an important Punjab family to which he belongs. The reader would, therefore, find his twin biography of President Nasser and the United Arab Republic, engrossingly interesting and deeply instructive.